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SHAKESPEARE:

HIS

LIFE, ART, AND CHARACTERS.

WITH

AN HISTORICAL SKETCH OF THE ORIGIN AND GROWTH OF THE DRAMA IN ENGLAND.

FOURTH EDITION, REVISED.

BY

THE REV. H. N. HUDSON, LL.D.

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SHAKESPEARE'S CHARACTERS.

HISTORICAL PLAYS.

KING JOHN.

SHAKESPEARE has probably done more to diffuse a knowledge of English history than all the historians put together; our liveliest and best impressions of "merry England in the olden time" being generally drawn from his pages. Though we seldom think of referring to him as authority in matters of fact, yet we are apt to make him our standard of old English manners and character and life, reading other historians by his light, and trying them by his measures, without being distinctly conscious of it.

It scarce need be said that the Poet's labours in this kind are as far as possible from being the unsouled political diagrams of history; they are, in the right and full sense of the term, dramatic revivifications of the Past, wherein the shades of departed things are made to live their life over again, to repeat themselves, as it were, under our eye; so that they have an interest for us such as no mere narrative of events can possess. If there are any others able to give us as just notions, provided we read them, still there are none who come near him in the art of causing themselves to be read. And the further we push our historical researches, the more we are brought to recognize the substantial justness of his representations. Even when he makes free with chronology, and varies from the actual order of things, it is commonly in quest of something higher and better than chronological accuracy; and the result is in

most cases favourable to right conceptions; the persons and events being thereby so knit together in a sort of vital harmony as to be better understood than if they were ordered with literal exactness of time and place. He never fails to hold the mind in natural intercourse and sympathy with living and operative truth. Kings and princes and the heads of the State, it is true, figure prominently in his scenes; but this is done in such a way as to set us face to face with the real spirit and sense of the people, whose claims are never sacrificed, to make an imposing pageant or puppet-show of political automatons. If he brings in fictitious persons and events, mixing them up with real ones, it is that he may set forth into view those parts and elements and aspects of life which lie without the range of common history; enshrining in representative ideal forms the else neglected substance of actual character.

But the most noteworthy point in this branch of the theme is, that out of the materials of an entire age and nation he so selects and uses a few as to give a just conception of the whole; all the lines and features of its life and action, its piety, chivalry, wisdom, policy, wit, and profligacy, being gathered up and wrought out in fair proportion and clear expression. Where he deviates most from all the authorities known to have been consulted by him, there is a large, wise propriety in his deviations, such as might well prompt the conjecture of his having written from some traditionary matter which the historians had failed to chronicle. And indeed some of those deviations have been remarkably verified by the researches of later times; as if the Poet had exercised a sort of prophetic power in his dramatic retrospections. So that our latest study and ripest judgment in any historical matter handled by him will be apt to fall in with and confirm the impressions at first derived from him; that which in the outset approved itself to the imagination as beautiful, in the end approving itself to the reason as true.

These remarks, however, must not be taken as in dispar-

agement of other forms of history. It is important for us to know much which it was not the Poet's business to teach, and which if he had attempted to teach, we should probably learn far less from him. Nor can we be too much on our guard against resting in those vague general notions of the Past which are so often found ministering to conceit and flippant shallowness. For, in truth, however we may exult in the free soarings of the spirit beyond the bounds of time and sense, one foot of the solid ground of Facts, where our thoughts must needs be limited by the matter that feeds them, is worth far more than acres upon acres of cloud-land glory where, as there is nothing to bound the sight, because nothing to be seen, so a man may easily credit himself with "gazing into the abysses of the infinite." And perhaps the best way to keep off all such conceit is by holding the mind down to the specialties of local and particular truth. These specialties, however, it is not for poetry to supply; nay, rather, it would cease to be poetry, should it go about to supply them. And it is enough that Shakespeare, in giving us what lay within the scope of his art, facilitates and furthers the learning of that which lies out of it; working whatever matter he takes into a lamp to light our way through that which he omits. This is indeed to make the Historical Drama what it should be, a "concentration of history"; setting our thoughts at the point where the several lines of truth converge, and from whence we may survey the field of his subject both in its unity and its variety.

All this is to be understood as referring specially to the Poet's dramas in English history; though much of it holds good also in regard to the Roman tragedies.* Of those

* The dramas derived from the English history, ten in number, form one of the most valuable of Shakespeare's works, and are partly the fruit of his maturest age. I say advisedly *one* of his works; for the Poet evidently intended them to form one great whole. It is, as it were, an historical heroic poem in the dramatic form, of which the several plays constitute the rhapsodies. The main features of the events are set forth with such fidelity; their causes, and even their secret springs, are placed in so clear a light; that we

dramas, ten in number, *King John* comes first in the historical order of time. And in respect of this piece the foregoing remarks are subject to no little abatement or qualification. As a work of art, the play has indeed considerable merit; but as a piece of historical portraiture its claims may easily be overstated. In such a work, diplomatic or documentary exactness is not altogether possible, nor is it even desirable any further than will run smooth with the conditions of the dramatic form. For, to be truly an historical *drama*, a work should not adhere to the literal truth of history in such sort as to hinder the proper dramatic life; that is, the laws of the Drama are here paramount to the facts of history; which infers that, where the two cannot stand together, the latter are to give way. Yet, when and so far as they are fairly compatible, neither ought to be sacrificed; at least, historical fidelity is so far essential to the *perfection* of the work. And Shakespeare's mastery of his art is especially apparent from the degree in which he has reconciled them. And the historical inferiority of *King John*, as will be shown hereafter, lies mainly in this, that, taking his other works in the same line as the standard, the facts of history are disregarded much beyond what the laws of Art seem to require.

may gain from them a knowledge of history in all its truth; while the living picture makes an impression on the imagination which can never be effaced. But this series of dramas is designed as the vehicle of a much higher and more general instruction; it furnishes examples of the political course of the world, applicable to all times. This mirror of kings should be the manual of princes: from it they may learn the intrinsic dignity of their hereditary vocation; but they will also learn the difficulties of their situation, the dangers of usurpation, the inevitable fall of tyranny, which buries itself under its attempts to obtain a firmer foundation; lastly, the ruinous consequences of the weaknesses, errors, and crimes of kings, for whole nations, and many subsequent generations. Eight of these plays, from *Richard the Second* to *Richard the Third*, are linked together in uninterrupted successions, and embrace a most eventful period of nearly a century of English history. The events portrayed in them not only follow each other, but are linked together in the closest and most exact connection; and the cycle of revolts, parties, civil and foreign wars, which began with the deposition of Richard the Second, first ends with the accession of Henry the Seventh to the throne. — SCHLEGEL.

The only extant or discovered notice of *King John*, till it appeared in the folio of 1623, is in the often-quoted list given by Francis Meres in his *Palladis Tamia*, 1598. So that all we can say with certainty is, that the play was written some time before that date. Various attempts have been made to argue the date of the writing from allusions to contemporary matters; but I cannot see that those attempts really amount to any thing at all. On the other hand, some of the German critics are altogether out, when, arguing from the internal evidences of style, structure of the verse, and tone of thought, they refer the piece to the same period of the author's life with *The Tempest*, *The Winter's Tale*, and *Cymbeline*. In these respects, it strikes me as having an intermediate cast between *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* and *The Merchant of Venice*. From the characteristics of style alone, I am quite persuaded that the play was written some considerable time before *King Henry the Fourth*. It thus synchronizes, I should say, very nearly with *King Richard the Second*. The matter is well stated by Schlegel: "In *King John* the political and warlike events are dressed out with solemn pomp, for the very reason that they have little of true grandeur. The falsehood and selfishness of the monarch speak in the style of a manifesto. Conventional dignity is most indispensable where personal dignity is wanting. Falconbridge is the witty interpreter of this language; he ridicules the secret springs of politics, without disapproving of them; for he owns that he is endeavouring to make his fortune by similar means, and would rather be of the deceivers than the deceived; there being in his view of the world no other choice." Schlegel thus regards the peculiarities in question as growing naturally out of the subject; whereas I have no scruple of referring them to the undergraduate state of the Poet's genius; for in truth they are much the same as in several other plays where no such cause has been alleged. These remarks, however, are hardly applicable except to the first three Acts of the play; in the last two we have much

more of the full-grown Shakespeare, sure-footed and self-supporting; the hidden elements of character, and the subtle shapings and turnings of guilty thought shining out in clear transparence, or flashing forth amidst the stress of passion; with kindlings of poetic and dramatic inspiration not unworthy the best workmanship of the Poet's middle period.

Shakespeare drew the material of his other histories from Holinshed, and no doubt had or might have had access to the same source in writing *King John*. Yet in all the others the rights of historic truth are for the most part duly observed. Which would seem to argue that in this case he not only left his usual guide, but had some special reason for doing so. Accordingly it appears that the forementioned sins against history were not original with him. The whole plot and plan of the drama, the events and the ordering of them, all indeed but the poetry and character, were borrowed.

The reign of King John was specially fruitful of doings such as might be made to tell against the old claims and usages of the Mediæval Church. This aptness of the matter caused it to be early and largely used in furthering the great ecclesiastical revolution of the sixteenth century. The precise date is not known, but Bishop Bale's pageant of *King John* was probably written in the time of Edward the Sixth. The design of this singular performance was to promote the Reformation, of which Bale was a very strenuous and unscrupulous supporter. Some of the leading events of John's reign, his disputes with the Pope, the sufferings of his kingdom under the interdict, the surrender of his crown to the Legate, and his reputed death by poison, are there used, or abused, in a way to suit the time and purpose of the writer. The historical characters are the King himself, Pope Innocent the Third, Pandulf, Langton, Simon of Swinstead, and a monk called Raymundus. With these are mixed various allegorical personages, —

England, who is said to be a widow, Imperial Majesty, Nobility, Clergy, Civil Order, Treason, Verity, and Sedition, the latter serving as the Jester of the piece. Thus we have the common material of the old Moral-plays rudely combined with some elements of the Historical Drama such as grew into use on the public stage forty or fifty years later. And the piece, though written by a bishop, teems with the lowest ribaldry and vituperation: therewithal it is totally barren of any thing that can pretend to the name of poetry or wit; in short, the whole thing is at once thoroughly stupid, malignant, and vile. There is no likelihood that Shakespeare knew any thing of Bale's pageant, as it was never printed till some forty years ago, the original manuscript having then been lately discovered in the library of the Duke of Devonshire.

The Troublesome Reign of John, King of England, upon which Shakespeare's play was founded, came from the press first in 1591, again in 1611, and a third time in 1622. The first issue was anonymous; the other two were put forth with Shakespeare's name as author; which really does nothing towards proving it to be his, as we have divers instances of other men's workmanship being fathered upon him. Steevens at one time thought it to be Shakespeare's, but afterwards gave it up, as he well might. Several of the German critics have taken the other side, arguing the point at great length, but with little effect. To answer their arguments were more easy than profitable; and such answer can better be spared than the space it would fill, since no English reader able to understand the reasoning will need it, after once reading the play. Coleridge indeed went so far in 1802 as to pronounce it "not his, yet of him"; a judgment in which few, I apprehend, will concur. In effect, all the English critics agree that he did not write it, though scarce any two of them agree who did.

The Troublesome Reign, which is in two Parts, bears strong internal marks of having been written when the enthusiasm of the nation was wrought up to the height about

the Spanish Armada, and when the Papacy was spitting its impotent thunders against the throne and state of the lion-Queen. Abounding in spoken and acted satire and invective, the piece must have been hugely grateful to that national feeling which issued in the Reformation, and which was mightily strengthened afterwards by the means made use of to put the Reformation down. The subject was strikingly apt for the purpose; which was no doubt the cause of its being chosen.

The piece, however, is a prodigious advance upon Bale's performance. The most considerable exception to this is where Falconbridge, while by the King's order he is plundering the religious houses, finds a fair young nun hidden in a chest which is supposed to contain the Abbot's treasures. Campbell regrets that the Poet did not retain this incident, — a regret in which I am far from sympathizing; for, surely, to hold up the crimes of individuals in such a way or at such a time as to set a stigma upon whole classes of men, was a work that might well be left to meaner hands.

An intense hatred of Popery runs as a special purpose through both of the older pieces. Which matter is reformed altogether in Shakespeare; who understood well enough, no doubt, that any such *special* purpose was quite inconsistent with the just proportions of Art. He therefore discovers no repugnance to Popery save in the form of a just and genuine patriotism; has no particular symptoms of a Protestant spirit, but only the natural beatings of a sound, honest English heart, resolute to withstand alike all foreign encroachments, whether from kings or emperors or popes. Thus his feeling against Rome is wisely tempered in that proportion which is required by the laws of morality and Art, issuing in a firm, manly national sentiment such as all men may justly respond to, be their creed what it may.

So that *King John*, as compared with the piece out of which it was built, yields a forcible instance and proof of the Poet's universality. He follows his predecessor in those things which appeal to the feelings of man as man, but for-

sakes him in whatever flatters the prejudices and antipathies of men as belonging to this or that party or sect. And as aversion to Rome is chastised down from the prominence of a special purpose, the parts of Arthur and Constance and Falconbridge proportionably rise; parts that spontaneously knit in with the common sympathies of humanity, — such a language as may always dwell together with the spirit of a man, and be twisted about his heart for ever.

Still the question recurs, Why did Shakespeare, with the authentic materials of history at hand, and with his own matchless power of shaping those materials into beautiful and impressive forms, — why did he, in this single instance, depart from his usual course, preferring a fabulous history to the true, and this too when, for aught now appears, the true would have answered his purpose just as well? It is to come at a probable answer to this question that I have dwelt so long on the two older pieces. We thus see that for special causes the subject was early brought upon the stage. The same causes long operated to keep it there. The *King John* of the stage, striking in with the passions and interests of the time, had become familiar to the people, and twined itself closely with their feelings and thoughts. A faithful version would have worked at great disadvantage in competition with the theatrical one thus established. This prepossession of the popular mind Shakespeare may well have judged it unwise to disturb. In other words, the current of popular association being so strong, he probably chose rather to fall in with it than to stem it. We may regret that he did so; but we can hardly doubt that he did it knowingly and on principle: nor should we so much blame him for not stemming that current as thank him for purifying it.

I will next present, as briefly as may be, so much of authentic history as will throw light directly on the subject. — Henry the Second, the first of the Plantagenet

kings, had four sons, Henry, Richard, Geoffrey, and John. Eleanor, his queen, was first married to Louis the Seventh of France, and some sixteen years after the marriage was divorced on suspicion of conjugal infidelity. Within six weeks after the divorce, she was married to Henry, then Earl of Anjou, and much younger than herself. She brought him large possessions indeed, but not enough to offset the trouble she caused in his family and kingdom. Unfaithful to her first husband, and jealous of the second, she instigated his sons into rebellion against him. In 1189, after a reign of thirty-five years, Henry died, invoking the vengeance of Heaven on the ingratitude of his children, and was succeeded by Richard, Henry and Geoffrey having died before him. Geoffrey, Duke of Bretagne in right of Constance his wife, left one son, Arthur. In 1190, when Arthur was a mere child, Richard contracted him in marriage with the daughter of Tancred, King of Sicily, at the same time owning him as "our most dear nephew, and heir, if by chance we should die without issue." At Richard's death, however, in 1199, John produced a testament of his brother's, giving him the crown. Anjou, Touraine, and Maine were the proper patrimony of the Plantagenets, and therefore devolved to Arthur as the acknowledged representative of that House, the rule of lineal succession being there fully established. To the ducal chair of Bretagne Arthur was the proper heir in right of his mother, who was then Duchess-regnant of that province. John claimed the dukedom of Normandy, as the proper inheritance from his ancestor, William the Conqueror, and his claim was there admitted. Poitou, Guienne, and five other French provinces were the inheritance of Eleanor his mother; but she made over her title to him; and there also his claim was recognized. The English crown he claimed in virtue of his brother's will, but took care to strengthen that claim by a parliamentary election. In the strict order of inheritance, all these possessions, be it observed, were due to Arthur; but that order, it appears,

was not then fully established, save in the provinces belonging to the House of Anjou.

As Duke of Bretagne, Arthur was a vassal of France, and therefore bound to homage as the condition of his title. Constance, feeling his need of a protector, engaged to Philip Augustus, King of France, that he should do homage also for the other provinces, where his right was clogged with no such conditions. Philip accordingly met him at Mans, received his oath, gave him knighthood, and took him to Paris. Philip was cunning, ambitious, and unscrupulous, and his plan was to drive his own interests in Arthur's name: with the Prince entirely in his power, he could use him as an ally or a prisoner, whichever would best serve his turn; and in effect "Arthur was a puppet in his hands, to be set up or knocked down, as he desired to bully or cajole John out of the territories he claimed in France." In the year 1200, Philip was at war with John in pretended maintenance of Arthur's rights; but before the end of that year the war ended in a peace, by the terms of which John was to give his niece, Blanche of Castile, in marriage to Louis the Dauphin, with a dowry of several valuable fiefs; and Arthur was to hold even his own Bretagne as a vassal of John. At the time of this treaty Constance was still alive; and Arthur, fearing, it is said, his uncle's treachery, remained in the care of Philip. In less than two years, however, the peace was broken. John, though his former wife was still living, having seized and married Isabella of Angouleme, already betrothed to the Count de la Marche, the Count headed an insurrection, and Philip joined him, brought Arthur again upon the scene, and made him raise the flag of war against his uncle. For some time Philip was carrying all before him, till at length Arthur was sent with a small force against the town of Mirabeau, where his grandmother Eleanor was stationed; and, while he was besieging her in the castle, John "used such diligence, that he was upon his enemies' necks ere they could understand any thing of his coming." His

mother was quickly relieved, Arthur fell into his hands, and was conveyed to the castle of Falaise; and Philip withdrew from the contest, as the people would have nothing to do with him but as the protector of their beloved Prince. The capture of Arthur took place in July, 1202, he being seventeen or eighteen years old.

The King then betook himself to England, and had his coronation repeated. Shortly after, he returned to France, where, a rumour being spread abroad of Arthur's death, the nobles made great suit to have him set at liberty. Not prevailing in this, they banded together, and "began to levy sharp wars against King John in divers places, insomuch that it was thought there would be no quiet in those parts so long as Arthur lived." A charge of murder being then carried to the French Court, the King was summoned thither for trial, but refused to go; whereupon he "was found guilty of felony and treason, and adjudged to forfeit all the lands which he held by homage." Thence sprang up a war in which John was totally stripped of his French possessions, and at last stole off with inexpressible baseness to England.

The quarrel of John with Pope Innocent did not break out till 1207. It was about the election of Cardinal Langton to the See of Canterbury. First came the interdict; then, some two years after, the excommunication; and finally, at a like interval, the deposition; Philip being engaged to go with an army, and execute the sentence; wherein he was likely to succeed, till at length, in the Spring of 1213, John made his full submission. The next year, he was desperately involved in the famous contest with his barons, which resulted in the establishment of the *Great Charter*. Of this great movement, so decisive for the liberties of England, Langton was the life and soul. As Primate he had been forced upon the King by the Pope; but he now stood by his country against both Pope and King. No sooner had John confirmed the Charter than his tyranny and perfidy broke out afresh; whereupon the barons,

finding that no laws nor oaths could curb the faithless and cruel devil within him, offered the crown to Louis the Dauphin on condition of his helping them put down the hated tyrant. John died in 1216.

The point where all the parts of *King John* centre and converge into one has been rightly stated to be the fate of Arthur. This is the heart, whose pulsations are felt throughout the entire structure. The alleged right of Arthur to the throne draws on the wars between Philip and John, and finally the loss from the English crown of the provinces in France. And so far the drama is strictly true to historical fact. But, besides this, the real or reputed murder of Arthur by John is set forth as the main cause of the troubles which distracted the latter part of John's reign, and ended only with his life. Which was by no means the case. For though, by the treatment of his nephew, John did greatly outrage the loyalty and humanity of the nation, still that was but one act in a life-long course of cruelty, cowardice, lust, and perfidy, which stamped him all over with baseness, and finally drew upon him the general hatred and execration of his subjects. Had he not thus sinned away and lost the hearts of the people, he might have safely defied the papal interdict; for who can doubt that they would have braved the thunders of the Vatican for him, since they did not scruple afterwards to do so against him? But the fact or the mode of Arthur's death was far from being the main cause of that loss. Pope Innocent the Third was a very great man: his proceedings against John were richly deserved: at that time there was no other power in Europe that could tame or restrain the savagery of such lawless and brutal oppressors; and the Church had, by her services to liberty and humanity, well earned the prerogatives then exercised in her name. The death of Arthur, though the consequences thereof survived in a general weakening of the English State, had quite ceased to be an active force in European

politics when the ecclesiastical tempest broke loose upon John.

Here, then, we have a breach of history in the very central point of the drama; this too without any apparent reason in the laws of the dramatic form. Such a flaw at the heart of the piece must greatly disarrange the order of the work as a representation of facts, and make it very untrue to the ideas and sentiments of the English people at the time; for it implies all along that Arthur was clearly the rightful sovereign, and that he was so regarded; whereas in truth the rule of lineal descent was not then settled in the State, and the succession of John to the throne was so far from being irregular, that of the last five occupants four had derived their main title from election, — the same right whereby John himself held it.

The same objection holds proportionably against another feature of the play. The life of the Austrian Archduke who had behaved so harshly and so meanly towards Richard the First is prolonged five or six years beyond its actual period, for no other purpose, apparently, than that Richard's natural son may have the honour of revenging his father's wrongs and death. Richard fell in a quarrel with Vidomar, Viscount of Limoges, one of his own vassals. A treasure having been found on Vidomar's estate, the King refused the offer of a part, and insisted on having the whole; and while, to enforce this claim, he was making war on the owner, he was wounded with an arrow by one of Vidomar's archers. This occurred in 1199, when Leopold of Austria had been dead several years. The play, however, drives the sin against history to the extreme point of making Austria and Limoges the same person. Now, if such an exploit were needful for the proper display of Falconbridge's character, it does not well appear but that the real Vidomar would have answered the purpose; at all events, the thing might surely have been compassed without so signal a breach of historical truth. Here, however, the vice stops with itself, instead of vitiating the other parts, as in the former case.

Again: In the play the people of Angiers stoutly refuse to own either John or Arthur as their king, until the question shall have first been decided in battle between them; whereas in fact Anjou, Touraine, and Maine declared for Arthur from the first, and did not waver at all in their allegiance. The drama also represents the imprisonment and death of Arthur as occurring in England; while in fact he was first put under guard in the castle of Falaise, and afterwards transferred to a dungeon in the castle of Rouen, from whence he was never known to come out alive. These, however, are immaterial points in the course of the drama, save as the latter has the effect of bringing Arthur nearer to the homes and hearts of the English people; who would naturally be more apt to resent his death, if it occurred at their own doors. Other departures from fact there are, which may easily be justified, as being more than made up by a gain of dramatic truth and effect. Such, for instance, are the freedoms taken with Constance, who, in the play, remains a widow after the death of her first husband, and survives to bewail the captivity of her son and the wreck of his hopes; but who, in fact, after a short widowhood was married to Guy of Thouars, and died in 1201, the year before Arthur fell into the hands of his uncle. A breach of history every way justifiable, since it gives an occasion, not otherwise to be had, for some noble outpourings of maternal grief and tenderness. And the mother's transports of sorrow might well consist with a second marriage, though to have represented her thus would have impaired the pathos of her situation, and at the same time have been a needless embarrassment of the action. It is enough that so she would have felt and spoken, had she been still alive; her proper character being thus allowed to transpire in circumstances which she did not live to see.

But, of the *justifiable* departures from fact, the greatest consists in anticipating by several years the papal instigations as the cause of the war in which Arthur was taken prisoner. For in reality Rome had no hand in setting on

that war; it was undertaken, as we have seen, by Philip of his own will and for his own ends; there being no rupture between John and the Pope till some time after Arthur had disappeared. But the laws of dramatic effect often require that the force and import of divers actual events be condensed and massed together. To disperse the interest over many details of action involves such a weakening of it as poetry does not tolerate. So that the Poet was eminently judicious in this instance of concentration. The conditions of right dramatic interest clearly required something of the kind. United, the several events might stand in the drama; divided, they must fall. Thus the course of the play in this matter was fitted to secure as much of actual truth as could be told *dramatically* without defeating the purpose of the telling. Shakespeare has many happy instances of such condensation in his historical pieces.

The reign of King John was specially remarkable as being the dawn of genuine English nationality, such as it has continued substantially to the present day. And the faults and crimes of the sovereign seem to have had the effect of testing and so toughening the national unity; just as certain diseases in infancy operate to strengthen the constitution of the man, and thus to prepare him for the struggles of life. England was then wrestled, as it were, into the beginnings of that just, sturdy, indomitable self-reliance, or *selfhood*, which she has ever since so gloriously maintained.

The Poet's vigorous and healthy national spirit is strongly manifested in the workmanship of *King John*. Falconbridge serves as a chorus to give a right political interpretation of the events and action of the play. To him, John impersonates the unity and majesty of the nation; so that defection from him tends to nothing less than national dissolution. Whatever he may be as a man, as King Patriotism has no way but to stand by him at all

hazards; for the rights and interests of England are inseparably bound up with the reverence of his person and the maintenance of his title. The crimes of the individual must not be allowed to peril the independence and life of the nation. Thus, in Falconbridge's view, England can only rest true to herself by sticking to the King against all comers whatsoever. And such, undoubtedly, is the right idea of the English State, and of the relation which the Crown bears to the other parts of her political Constitution. No philosophy or statesmanship has got beyond Shakespeare in the mastery of this principle. And this principle is the moral backbone of the drama, however the *poetry* of it may turn upon other points.

As for the politics of the piece, these present a rather tangled and intricate complication, which it would hardly pay to trace out in detail; at least, the doing so would strike something too wide of my usual method and purpose in these discourses. Besides, the ground in this respect is well covered by Gervinus, who has worked through the process with great ability indeed, though, as it seems to me, at a rather unconscionable length.*

The characterization of *King John* corresponds very well, in the degree of excellence, with the period to which I have on other grounds assigned the writing. Much of it, and indeed nearly all, at least in the germs and outlines, was taken from *The Troublesome Reign;* and the use of

* Here is a brief portion: "John, imprudent once in resting on false supports, is so now in the wicked removal of weak enemies, and in the dangerous provocation of strong opposition. He contrives the murder of the harmless Arthur, and irritates the already-disturbed Church by fresh extortions. The legate Pandulf, a master of Machiavelian policy, watches these errors, and builds upon them the new unhallowed league between France and Rome; with cold blood he speculates how Arthur's death may be occasioned by a French invasion, and this again may be advanced by the accusation produced by the murder. This practical prophecy is fulfilled: the country becomes unruly: the King's evil conscience is roused; suspiciously he has himself crowned a second time, and this makes his nobles suspicious also. The murder of Arthur comes to their hearing; they revolt from the King. A new antinational league is formed between the English vassals on the one side and

the borrowed matter discovers a mark-worthy exercise of judgment in much retrenching of superfluities, in not a little moral purging and refining, in skilful recasting of features, and in many ennobling additions.

The delineation of the English barons is made to reflect the tumultuous and distracted condition of the time, when the best men were inwardly divided and fluctuating between the claims of parliamentary election and actual possession on the one side, and the rights of lineal succession on the other. In such a conflict of duties and motives, the moral sense often drawing sharply at odds with urgent political considerations, the clearest heads and most upright hearts are apt to lose their way; nor perhaps is it much to be wondered at if in such a state of things self-interest, the one constant motive of human action, gain such headway at last as to swamp all other regards. The noble and virtuous Salisbury successfully resists this depraving tendency indeed, yet the thorns and dangers of the time prove too much for his judgment. From the outset he is divided between allegiance to John and to Arthur, till the crimes and cruelties of the former throw him quite over to the side of the latter. Humanity outwrestles nationality in his breast, and this even to the sacrifice of humanity itself, as matters turn: his scrupulous preference of moral to prudential regards draws him into serious error; which, to be sure, his rectitude of purpose is prompt to retrace, but not

France and the Pope on the other; and the French Dauphin prepares on his part a treacherous death for the traitors to England. Meanwhile the fearful and perplexed John loses his old courage and confidence so far, that he takes his land as a fief from the Pope, and enters into a shameful treaty of subjection to the most virulent of his enemies. The King has forgotten his former vigour, which the enemy has now learned from him; he turns his hardened zeal against poor prophets, only to benumb his superstitious fear; his energy is gone. The unnaturalness of all these complicated alliances is now speedily manifested; the league between England and the Papacy, that between the Papacy and France, that between France and the English vassals, all are broken up, without attaining the object of one of them: they change throughout into the natural enmity which severed interests necessitate."

till the mistake has nearly crippled his power for good. His course well illustrates the peril to which goodness, more sensitive than far-sighted, is exposed in such a hard tussle of antagonist principles. In the practical exigencies of life, doing the best we can for those who stand nearest us is often nobler than living up to our own ideal. So there are times when men must set up their rest to stand by their country, right or wrong, and not allow any faults of her rulers to alienate them from her cause. Sometimes the highest sacrifice which Providence requires of us is that of our finer moral feelings, nay, even of our sense of duty itself, to the rough occasions of patriotism. Is it that our own salvation may even depend on willingness to be lost for the saving of others? All this is rarely exemplified in Salisbury, who, by the way, was the famous William Longsword, natural son to Henry the Second, and so half-brother to John. It is considerable that our better feelings stay with him even when the more reckless spirit and coarser nature of Falconbridge carry off our judgment.

The King, as he stands in authentic history, was such a piece of irredeemable depravity, so thoroughly weak-headed, rotten-hearted, and bloody-handed, that to set him forth truly without seeming to be dealing in caricature or lampoon, required no little art. The Poet was under the necessity, in some sort, of leaving his qualities to be inferred, instead of showing them directly: the point was, to disguise his meannesses, and yet so to order the disguise as to suggest that it covered something too vile to be seen. And what could better infer his slinking, cowardly, malignant spirit, than his two scenes with Hubert? Here he has neither the boldness to look his purpose in the face, nor the rectitude to dismiss it; so he has no way but to "dodge and palter in the shifts of lowness": he tries by hints and fawning innuendoes to secure the passage of his thought into effect, without committing himself to any responsibility for it; and wants another to be the agent of

his will, and yet bear the blame as if acting of his own accord. And afterwards, when the consequences begin to press upon him, he accuses the aptness of the instrument as the cause of his suggestion; and the only sagacity he displays is in shirking the responsibility of his own guilty purpose; his sneaking, selfish fear inspiring him with a quickness and fertility of thought far beyond his capacity under any nobler influences.

The chief trouble with John in the play is, that he conceives himself in a false position, and so becomes himself false to his position in the hope of thereby rendering it secure. He has indeed far better reasons for holding the throne than he is himself aware of, and the utter selfishness of his aims is what keeps him from seeing them. His soul is so bemired in personal regards, that he cannot rise to any considerations of patriotism or public spirit. The idea of wearing the crown as a sacred trust from the nation never once enters his head. And this is all because he lacks the nobleness to rest his title on national grounds; or because he is himself too lawless of spirit to feel the majesty with which the national law has invested him. As the interest and honour of England have no place in his thoughts, so he feels as if he had stolen the throne, and appropriated it to his own private use. This consciousness of bad motives naturally fills him with dark suspicions and sinister designs. As he is without the inward strength of noble aims, so he does not feel outwardly strong; his bad motives put him upon using means as bad for securing himself; and he can think of no way to clinch his tenure but by meanness and wrong. Thus his sense of inherent baseness has the effect of casting him into disgraces and crimes; his very stings of self-reproach driving him on from bad to worse. If he had the manhood to trust his cause frankly with the nation, as rightly comprehending his trust, he would be strong in the nation's support; but this he is too mean to see.

Nor is John less wanting in manly fortitude than in moral principle: he has not the courage even to be daringly

and resolutely wicked; that is, there is no backbone of truth in him either for good or for evil. Insolent, heart-swollen, defiant under success, he becomes utterly abject and cringing in disaster or reverse. "Even so doth valour's show and valour's worth divide in storms of fortune." When his wishes are crowned, he struts and talks big; but a slight whirl in the wind of chance at once twists him off his pins and lays him sprawling in the mud. That his seeming greatness is but the distention of gas, appears in that the touch of pain or loss soon pricks him into an utter collapse. So that we may almost apply to him what Ulysses says of Achilles in *Troilus and Cressida:*

> "Possess'd he is with greatness;
> And speaks not to himself, but with a pride
> That quarrels at self-breath: imagin'd worth
> Holds in his blood such swoln and hot discourse,
> That 'twixt his mental and his active parts
> Kingdom'd Achilles in commotion rages,
> And batters down himself."

And as, in his craven-hearted selfishness, John cares nothing for England's honour, nor even for his own as king, but only to retain the spoil of his self-imputed trespass; so he will at any time trade that honour away, and will not mind eating dirt to the King of France or to the Pope, so he may keep his place.

All this was no doubt partly owing to the demoralizing influences of the time. And how deeply those influences worked is well shown in the hoary-headed fraud and heartlessness of priestcraft as represented in Cardinal Pandulf; who makes it his special business to abuse the highest faculties to the most refined ill purposes; with subtle and tortuous casuistry explaining away perfidy, treachery, and murder into works of righteousness. The arts of deceit could hardly have come to be used with such unctious self-approval, but from a long discipline of civilized selfishness in endeavouring to prevent or to parry the assaults of violence and barbarism. For, in a state of continual danger

and insecurity, cultivated intelligence is naturally drawn to defend itself by subtlety and craft. The ethereal weapons of reason and sanctity are powerless upon men stupefied by brutal passions; and this is too apt to generate even in the best characters a habit of seeking safety by "bowing their gray dissimulation" into whatever causes they take in hand. Which, I suspect, would go far to explain the alleged system of "pious frauds" once so little scrupled in the walks of religion and learning. Be this as it may, there was, it seems, virtue enough in the England of King John to bring her safe and sound through the vast perils and corruptions of the time. That reign was in truth the seed-bed of those forces which have since made England so great and wise and free.

All through the reigns of Henry the Seventh and Henry the Eighth, the lately-experienced horrors of civil slaughter in the York and Lancaster wars made the English people nervously apprehensive as to the consequences of a disputed title to the throne. This apprehension had by no means worn off in Shakespeare's time: the nation was still extremely tenacious of the lineal succession, as the only practicable safeguard against the danger of rival claimants. The dogma of the divine right, which then got such headway, was probably more or less the offspring of this sentiment. It has often seemed to me that the Poet, in his sympathy with this strong national feeling, was swayed somewhat from the strict line of historic truth and reason, in ascribing John's crimes and follies, and the evils of his reign, so much to a public distrust of his title. I question whether such distrust really had any considerable hand in those evils. The King's title was generally held at the time to be every way sound and clear. The nervous dread of a disputed succession was mainly the growth of later experience, and then was putatively transferred to a time when, in fact, it had been little felt. And the anxiety to fence off the evils so dreaded naturally caused the powers

of the crown to be strained up to a pitch hardly compatible with any degree of freedom; insomuch that in no long time another civil war became necessary, to keep the liberties of England from being swallowed up in the Serbonian bog of royal prerogative. In the apprehension of an experienced danger on one side, men comparatively lost sight of an equal danger on the other side.

I suspect that the genius and art of Mrs. Siddons caused the critics of her time and their immediate successors to set a higher estimate upon the delineation of Constance than is fully justified by the work itself. The part seems indeed to have been peculiarly suited to the powers of that remarkable actress; the wide range of moods, and the tugging conflicts of passion, through which Constance passes, affording scope enough for the most versatile gifts of delivery. If I am right in my notion, Shakespearian criticism has not even yet quite shaken off the spell thus cast upon it. At all events, I find the critics still pitching their praise of the part in a somewhat higher key than I can persuade my voice to sound. The abatement, however, which I would make refers not so much to the conception of the character as to the style of the execution; which, it seems to me, is far from displaying the Poet's full strength and inwardness with nature. There is in many of her speeches a redundancy of rhetoric and verbal ingenuity, giving them a too theatrical relish. The style thus falls under a reproof well expressed in this very play:

> "When workmen strive to do better than well,
> They do confound their skill in covetousness."

In pursuance of the same thought, Bacon finely remarks the great practical difference between the love of excellence and the love of excelling. And so here we seem to have rather too much of that elaborate artificialness which springs more from ambition than from inspiration. But the fault is among those which I have elsewhere noted as marking the workmanship of the Poet's earlier period.

The idea pervading the delineation is well stated by Hazlitt as "the excess of maternal tenderness, rendered desperate by the fickleness of friends and the injustice of fortune, and made stronger in will, in proportion to the want of all other power." In the judgment of Gervinus, "ambition spurred by maternal love, maternal love fired by ambition and womanly vanity, form the distinguishing features" of Constance; and he further describes her as "a woman whose weakness amounts to grandeur, and whose virtues sink into weakness." I am not indeed greatly in love with this brilliant way of putting things; but Gervinus is apt to be substantially right in such matters. My own tamer view is that the character, though drawn in the best of situations for its amiability to appear, is not a very amiable one. Herein the play is perhaps the truer to history; as the chroniclers make Constance out rather selfish and weak; not so religious in motherhood but that she betrayed a somewhat unvenerable impatience of widowhood. Nevertheless it must be owned that the soul of maternal grief and affection speaks from her lips with not a little majesty of pathos, and occasionally flows in strains of the most melting tenderness. I know not how the voice of a mother's sorrow could discourse more eloquently than in these lines:

> "Grief fills the room up of my absent child,
> Lies in his bed, walks up and down with me;
> Puts on his pretty looks, repeats his words,
> Remembers me of all his gracious parts,
> Stuffs out his vacant garments with his form:
> Then, have I reason to be fond of grief."

Nor is there any overstraining of nature in the imagery here used; for the speaker's passion is of just the right kind and degree to kindle the imagination into the richest and finest utterance.

On the other hand, the general effect of her sorrow is marred by too great an infusion of anger, and she shows too much pride, self-will, and volubility of scorn, to have

the full touch of our sympathies. Thus, when Eleanor coarsely provokes her, she retorts in a strain of still coarser railing; and the bandying of taunts and slurs between them, each not caring what she says, so her speech bites the other, is about equally damaging to them both; a storm of mutual abuse, in which there is neither modesty nor wit. It is true, she meets with very sore trials of patience, but these can hardly be said to open any springs of sweetness or beauty within her. When she finds that her heart's dear cause is sacrificed to the schemes of politicians; when it turns out that the King of France and the Archduke of Austria are driving their own ends in her name, and only pretending pity for her and conscience of right, to cover their selfish projects, the heart-wringing disappointment inflames her into outbursts of sarcastic bitterness and scorn; her speech is stinging and spiteful, and sounds quite as much of the intemperate scold as of the sorrowing and disconsolate mother. The impression of her behaviour in these points is well described by Gervinus: "What a variety of feeling is expressed in those twenty lines where she inquires anxiously after the truth of that which shocks her to hear! How her grief, so long as she is alone, restrains itself in calmer anguish in the vestibule of despair! how it first bursts forth in the presence of others in powerless revenge, rising to a curse which brings no blessing to herself! and how atoningly behind all this unwomanly rage lies the foil of maternal love! We should be moved with too violent a pity for this love, if it did not weaken our interest by its want of moderation; we should turn away from the violence of the woman, if the strength of her maternal affection did not irresistibly enchain us."

As Shakespeare used the allowable license of art in stretching the life of Constance beyond its actual date, that he might enrich his work with the eloquence of a mother's love; so he took a like freedom in making Arthur younger than the facts prescribed, that he might in larger measure

pour in the sweetness of childish innocence and wit. Both of these departures from strict historic order are highly judicious; at least they are amply redeemed by the dramatic wealth which comes in fitly through them. And in the case of Arthur there is the further gain, that the sparing of his eyes is owing to his potency of tongue and the piercing touch of gentleness; whereas in the history he is indebted for this to his strength of arm. The Arthur of the play is an artless, gentle, natural-hearted, but high-spirited, eloquent boy, in whom we have the voice of nature pleading for nature's rights, unrestrained by pride of character or place; who at first braves his uncle, because set on to do so by his mother; and afterwards fears him, yet knows not why, because his heart is too full of "the holiness of youth" to conceive how any thing so treacherous and unnatural can be, as that which he fears. And he not only has a most tender and loving disposition, such as cruelty itself can hardly resist, but is also persuasive and wise far beyond his years; though his power of thought and magic of speech are so managed as rather to aid the impression of his childish age. Observe, too, how in the scene with Hubert his very terror operates in him a sort of preternatural illumination, and inspires him to a course of innocent and unconscious cunning, — the perfect art of perfect artlessness. Of the scene in question Hazlitt justly says, "If anything ever were penned, heart-piercing, mixing the extremes of terror and pity, of that which shocks and that which soothes the mind, it is this scene." Yet even here the tender pathos of the loving and lovely boy is marred with some "quirks of wit," such as I can hardly believe the Poet would have allowed in his best days. In Arthur's dying speech, — "O me! my uncle's spirit is in these stones," — our impression against John is most artfully heightened; all his foregoing inhumanity being, as it were, gathered and concentrated into an echo. — Shakespeare has several times thrown the witchery of his genius into pictures of nursery life, bringing children upon the scene, and delighting us

with their innocent archness and sweet-witted prattle; as in the case of Mamillius in *The Winter's Tale*, and of Lady Macduff and her son; but Arthur is his most powerful and charming piece in that line. That his great, simple, manly heart loved to play with childhood, is indeed evident enough. Nor is it the least of his claims to our reverence, as an organ of Nature's bland and benignant wisdom.

The reign of King John furnished no characters fully answering the conditions of high dramatic interest. To meet this want, therefore, there was need of one or more *representative* characters, — persons in whom should be centred and consolidated various elements of national character, which were in fact dispersed through many individuals; or a boiling down of the diffused old John Bull into an ideal specimen. And such is Falconbridge, with his fiery flood of Norman vigour bounding through his veins, his irrepressible dance of animal spirits, his athletic and frolicsome wit, his big, brave, manly heart, his biting sword, and his tongue equally biting; his soul proof-armoured against all fear save that of doing what were wrong or mean.

The Troublesome Reign supplied the name, and also a slight hint towards the character:

> "Next them a bastard of the King deceas'd,
> A hardy wild-head, rough and venturous."

But the delineation is thoroughly Shakespearian, is crammed brimful of the Poet's most peculiar mental life; so that the man is as different as can well be conceived from any thing ever dreamed of in the older play. And, what is specially worth the noting, Shakespeare clearly embodies in him his own sentiment of nationality, pours his hearty, full-souled English spirit into him and through him; so that the character is, at least in the political sense, truly representative of the author; — all this, however, without the slightest tincture of egotism or self-obtrusion; the pure nationality of the man, extricated from all personal and partisan mixtures. So, to Falconbridge, both head and heart, the King,

as before remarked, is truly the Impersonation of the State, and he surrounds the throne with all those nobilities of thought, and all those ideas of majesty and reverence, which are wanting in John himself. He thus regards the crown just as the wearer ought to regard it. Withal he is fully alive to the wrong-headedness and moral baseness of the King; but the office is to him so sacred as the palladium of national unity and life, that he will allow neither himself nor others in his presence to speak disrespectfully of the man.

Falconbridge is strangely reckless of appearances. But his heart is evidently much better than his tongue: from his speech you might suppose gain to be his God of gods; but a far truer language, which he uses without knowing it, tells you that gain is to him just no god at all: he talks as if he cared for nothing but self-interest, while his works proclaim a spirit framed of disinterestedness; his action thus quietly giving the lie to his words; this too in such sort as establishes the more firmly his inward truth. His course in this behalf springs partly from an impulse of antagonism to the prevailing spirit about him, where he sees great swollen pretences to virtue without a particle of the thing itself. What he most of all abominates is the pursuit of selfish and sinister ends under the garb of religion; piety on the tongue with covetousness in the heart fills him with intense disgust; and his repugnance is so strong, that it sets him spontaneously upon assuming a garb of selfishness to cover his real conscientiousness of mind and purpose. So too, secretly, he is as generous as the Sun, but his generosity puts on an affectation of rudeness or something worse: he will storm at you, to bluff you off from seeing the kindness he is doing you. Of the same stripe is his hatred of cruelty and meanness: while these things are rife about him, he never gets angry or makes any quarrel with them; on the contrary, he laughs and breaks sinewy jests over them, as if he thought them witty and smart: upon witnessing the heartless and unprincipled bargaining of the

Kings, he passes it off jocosely as a freak of the "mad world," and verbally frames for himself a plan that "smacks somewhat of the policy"; then, instead of acting out what he thus seems to relish as a capital thing, he goes on to shame down, as far as may be, all such baseness by an example of straightforward nobleness and magnanimity. Then too, with all his laughing roughness of speech and iron sternness of act, so blunt, bold, and downright, he is nevertheless full of humane and gentle feeling. With what burning eloquence of indignation does he denounce the supposed murder of Arthur! though he has no thought of abetting his claims to the throne against the present occupant. He abhors the deed as a crime: but to his keen, honest eye it is also a stupendous blunder; and he deplores it as such, because its huge offensiveness to England's heart is what makes it a blunder, and because he is himself in full sympathy with the national conscience, which cannot but be shocked at its hideous criminality. So it may be doubted whether he more resents the wickedness or the stupidity of the act. And how much it imperils the State is revealed to him in the hard strain it makes on his own determined allegiance.

The Poet manages with great art that Falconbridge may be held to John throughout the play by ties which he is too clear of head and too upright of heart to think of renouncing. In the first place, he has been highly trusted and honoured by the King, and he cannot be ungrateful. Then again, in his clear-sighted and comprehensive public spirit, the diverse interests that split others into factions, and plunge them into deadly strife, are smoothly reconciled: political regards work even more than personal gratitude, to keep him steadfast to the King; and he is ready with tongue and sword to beat down whatsoever anywhere obstructs a broad and generous nationality. In the intercourse of State functionaries, he, to be sure, pays little heed to the delicacies and refinements of political diplomacy: his plain, frank nature either scorns them or is insensible to

them: but his patriotism is thoroughly sound and true, and knows no taste of fear; and whatever foreign assailants dare to touch England or England's honour, he is for pounding them straight out of the way, and will think of no alternative but to be pounded out of the way by them. — As a representative character, he stands next to Falstaff. Thoroughly Gothic in features and proportions, and as thoroughly English in temper and spirit, his presence rays life and true manliness into every part of the drama. Is it strange that a nation which could grow such originals should have beaten all the rest of the world in every thing useful and beautiful and great?

KING RICHARD THE SECOND.

King Richard the Second is first heard of through an entry in the Stationers' register, dated August 29, 1597. The play was published in the course of the same year, but without the author's name. The same text was issued again in 1598, with "By William Shakespeare" in the title-page. There was a third issue in 1608, the title-page having the words, "With new additions of the Parliament-Scene, and the deposing of King Richard." These additions are in Act iv. scene 1, comprising a hundred and sixty-four lines, or about half the Act. A fourth quarto edition appeared in 1615, the text being the same as in that of 1608. Of course the play reappeared along with the others in the folio of 1623. In the folio text, however, several passages, including in all just fifty lines, are unaccountably wanting; the omissions, in some cases, making a palpable break in the continuity of the sense. The text of 1597 is, I believe, generally allowed to be the best of the five, except as regards the additions of 1608; each later issue retaining the errors of the earlier, with new ones of its own.

As to the date of the composition, we have nothing decisive beyond the entry at the Stationers'. Malone assigns the writing to 1593; Chalmers, to 1596; and others, to various dates between those two. To the best of my judgment, the internal evidence of style, the abundance of rhymes, the frequent passages of elaborate verbal trifling, the smooth-flowing current of the verse, and the comparative uncompactness of texture, make strongly in favour of as early a date as 1594, when the author was thirty years old. In all these respects, a comparison of the play with the First Part of *King Henry the Fourth*, which could not have been written later than 1597, will, I think, satisfy almost any one that there must have been an interval of several years between the two. And we have another sort of argument which, it seems to me, carries no little force towards the same conclusion. The first four Books of Daniel's *History of the Civil Wars*, three of which are wholly occupied with the closing passages of Richard's government and life, were originally published in 1595. Samuel Daniel was a star, not indeed of the first magnitude, nor perhaps of the second, but yet a star in that matchless constellation of wits contemporary with Elizabeth and James which has since made England the brightness of the whole earth. As he was himself a writer of plays, and an aspirant for dramatic honours, it is hardly to be supposed that he would be away from the theatre when "th' applause, delight, the wonder of our stage" was making the place glorious with his "Delphic lines."

The poem and the play in question have several passages so similar in thought and language as to argue that one of the authors must have drawn from the other. This, to be sure, will of itself conclude nothing as to which way the obligation ran. But there is another sort of resemblance much more to the point. Shakespeare, in strict keeping with the nature and purpose of his work, makes the Queen, in mind, character, and deportment, a full-grown woman; whereas, in fact, she was at the time only

twelve years old, having been married when she was but eight: a liberty of art every way justifiable in an historical drama, and such as he never scruples to use when the proper ends of dramatic representation may be furthered thereby. On the other hand, the plan of Daniel's poem, and also the bent of his mind, caused him to write, for the most part, with the historical accuracy of a chronicle, insomuch that the fine vein of poetry which was in him hardly had fair play, being overmuch hampered by the rigidity of literal truth. Yet he makes a similar departure from fact in regard to the Queen, representing her very much as she is in the play. The point, then, is, that such a departure, however justifiable in either case, seems more likely to have been original in the play than in the poem: in the former it grew naturally from the purpose of the work and the usual method of the workman; in the latter its cause appears to be rather in the force of example: in other words, Shakespeare was more likely to do it because, artistically, it ought so to be; Daniel, because it had been so done with success. And it is considerable that Daniel pushes the divergence from historic truth even further than Shakespeare; in which excess we may easily detect the influence of a model: for that which proceeds by the reason and law of Art naturally stops with them; but in proceeding by the measure of examples and effects such is not the case; and hence it is that imitation is so apt to exaggerate whatever traits it fastens on. To all which if we add, as we justly may, that both this and the other resemblances are such withal as would naturally result from the impressions of the stage, the whole makes at least something of probability for the point in question. It has indeed been urged further, that in certain other respects Daniel here rises, much more than his wont, above the tame, dry level of fact as he found it delivered in the chronicles; as if some special inspiration from without had in this case lifted him to a higher style; but I have to confess that such arguments seem quite too shaky to be trusted with much weight of inference.

Some question has been made as to whether the "additions" first printed in the quarto of 1608 were written at the same time with the rest of the play. The judgment of, I believe, all the best critics is that they were; and such is clearly my own. They are all of a piece with the surrounding portions: there is nothing either in the style, the matter, or the connection of them, to argue or even to indicate in the slightest degree a different period of workmanship. Nor is this judgment at all hindered by the fact of their non-appearance in the two earlier issues of the play. For Elizabeth was then on the throne; to whose ears the deposing of monarchs was a very ungrateful theme, especially after the part she had in deposing from both crown and life her enchanting and ill-starred kinswoman, the witty and beautiful Mary of Scotland. Her sensitiveness in this behalf was shown on various occasions. Thus in 1599 Hayward barely escaped prosecution for his *History of King Henry the Fourth*, which related the deposing of Richard; all because of the Queen's extreme jealousy lest the matter should be drawn into a precedent against herself. So that, supposing those "additions" to have been a part of the play as originally written, it is pretty certain that no publisher would have dared to issue them, however they may have been allowed on the stage.

There was certainly one and perhaps two other plays in Shakespeare's time on the subject of Richard the Second. This we learn beyond peradventure from Dr. Simon Forman, the astrologer and quack, whose *Diary* I have already quoted in connection with *The Winter's Tale*. Under date of April 30, 1611, he notes the performance of a play called *Richard the Second* at the Globe theatre; adding such particulars of the plot and action as make it evident that the play could not have been Shakespeare's, though performed at the theatre for which he had so long been used to write. The details noted by Forman ascertain the piece to have embraced the insurrection of Wat Tiler and Jack Straw, with various other matters occurring before the out-

break of the quarrel between Bolingbroke and Norfolk. Forman says nothing about the deposing of Richard; an event which he would hardly have failed to mention, had it formed any part of the play.

This brings me to a curious affair of State which took place in 1601. It appears that in February of that year the partisans and accomplices of Essex, in pursuance of the conspiracy they had formed, and to further the insurrection they had planned, procured a play to be acted, wherein the deposing of Richard the Second was represented. The affair is briefly related in Camden's *Annals*, and the main points of it are further known from Lord Bacon's official papers concerning "the treason of Robert, Earl of Essex." Bacon's statement tallies exactly with another document lately discovered in the State-Paper Office. This ascertains that on the 18th of February, 1601, Augustine Phillips, a member of the same theatrical company with Shakespeare, was examined under oath, in support of the prosecution, by Chief-Justice Popham, Justice Anderson, and Sergeant Fenner. Phillips testified that a few days before some of Essex's partisans had applied, in his presence, to the leaders of the Globe company, "to have the play of the deposing and killing of King Richard the Second played the Saturday next, promising to give them forty shillings more than their ordinary" for playing it. Phillips also testified that he and his fellows had determined to act some other play, "holding the play of King Richard to be so old, and so long out of use, that they should have small or no company at it," but that the extra forty shillings induced them to change their purpose, and do as they were requested.

Until this deposition came to light, it was not known what theatrical company had undertaken the performance for which the friends of Essex were prosecuted. We now know that it was the company to which Shakespeare belonged, and by which his play had for some time been owned and often acted. It is nowise likely, as we have

seen, that the piece bespoken by the conspirators was the same which Forman witnessed ten years later. It is indeed possible that the play so bespoke may have been a third one on the same subject, that has not elsewhere been heard of; but this, to say the least, appears highly improbable. To be sure, the play engaged for that occasion is spoken of as being "so old, and so long out of use," that it was not likely to draw an audience; which circumstance has been rather strongly urged against supposing it to have been Shakespeare's. But these words need not infer any more than that the play had lost the charm of novelty; a thing which, considering the marvellous fertility of the time in dramatic production, might well enough have come about in the course of five or six years.

My own judgment, therefore, is, that Shakespeare's *King Richard the Second* was written as early as 1594; that it is the play referred to in the trial of Essex and his accomplices; and that for reasons of State the deposition-scene was withheld from the press till some time after the accession of James the First, when such reasons were no longer held to be of any force.

The leading events of *King Richard the Second*, and all the persons except the Queen, the whole substance, action, and interest, are purely historical, with only such heightening of effect, such vividness of colouring, and such vital invigoration, as poetry can add without marring or displacing the truth of history; the Poet having entirely forborne that freedom of art in representative character which elsewhere issued in such delectations as Falconbridge and Falstaff. For the materials of the drama, Shakespeare need not have gone beyond the pages of Holinshed; and it is certain that he drew directly from that source; though there are several passages which show traces of his reading in the older work of Hall. In the current of Holinshed's narrative, the quarrel of Bolingbroke and Norfolk strikes in so abruptly, is so inexplicable in its origin, and so teem-

ing with great results, as to form, naturally and of itself, the beginning of the manifold national tragedy which ends only with the catastrophe of *King Richard the Third.* The cause indeed of that quarrel is hardly less obscure in the history than in the play: it stands out almost as something uncaused, so that there was no need of going behind it; while at the same time it proves the germ of such a vast and varied procession of historical events as to acquire the highest importance.

It may throw some light on the action of the play to revert briefly to a few antecedent points of history. — At the death of his grandfather, Edward the Third, in June, 1377, Richard was only in his eleventh year; a very handsome boy, with fair gifts of mind, and not without amiable dispositions, but of just about the right age to be spoiled by the influences of his position. Of course he was too young to be capable of rule, while the English had not yet learned how to bridge over the nonage of their king by a settled regency. The youth was fond of pleasure, careless of expense, and apt to love those who humoured his fancies; and in effect the State soon became a prey to rapacious and unprincipled sycophants. Of his three uncles, the Dukes of Lancaster, York, and Gloster, the latter was much the ablest; but, in an age of fierceness and turbulence, was chiefly distinguished for his fierce, turbulent, and despotic temper. Gloster undertook to root out "the caterpillars of the commonwealth"; and his doings in this behalf so strengthened his influence, that in 1387 he drew into his own hands nearly the whole power of the State, and reduced the King to a mere cipher. In this career he proved such a remorseless and sanguinary tyrant, that some year and a half later Richard succeeded, by a well-timed stroke of vigour, in shaking off the tyranny, and becoming his own master. The government then went on in a smooth and tranquil course for several years; during which time a fresh batch of greedy and reckless favorites got warmed into life; Gloster used means to regain his broken

influence, and took advantage of his seat in the Council to baffle and irritate the King, was the chief mover of every intrigue, the soul of every faction that opposed Richard's wishes; the King's first wife, "the good Queen Anne," having died, he espoused the Princess Isabella of France, then in her eighth year.

Emboldened by this alliance, the King in 1397 resolved to execute his long-cherished but deeply-dissembled scheme of vengeance against the Duke of Gloster. The matter was carried with great secrecy and despatch, Richard himself leading the party that went to apprehend the Duke at his own castle. When Gloster, not dreaming what was on foot, came out to meet the King, he was forthwith delivered into the hands of Norfolk, who was then governor of Calais, and who, while pretending to conduct Gloster to the Tower, spirited him away down the river, and across to Calais, and there lodged him in the castle. Richard's fury, so long repressed, now broke loose. The Duke, in his absence, was impeached of treason for what he had done ten years before. Bolingbroke concurred in this impeachment. When Norfolk was ordered to bring his prisoner before the House, he replied that he could not do so, as the Duke had suddenly died. Gloster was now out of the way, and, as it was generally thought, by means the most foul; and his former partisans, notwithstanding they had been pardoned and taken into seeming favour, were made to taste the full measure of Richard's vengeance. In these doings the King's real character was fairly disclosed. The smiles and affability in which he had so long cloaked his revenge, his perfidious favours towards his destined victims, and his contempt of law and justice as soon as he felt secure in his power, appalled not only Gloster's former adherents, but all who had ever incurred the royal displeasure. Bolingbroke, as we have seen, had of late sided with Richard in the impeachment of his uncle. But he had been himself more or less implicated as a partisan of Gloster's in those very doings which were now drawing the King's vengeance

on so many others: though now seeming to stand firm in Richard's good-will, and though lately advanced by him from Earl of Derby to Duke of Hereford, he might well distrust a hand that had approved itself so false and treacherous in its favours.

Here, most likely, we have the true secret of Bolingbroke's sudden and otherwise inexplicable rupture with the Duke of Norfolk. The two had lately ridden together in a friendly manner, and during the ride had opened their minds to each other with apparent freedom and sincerity touching the King's doings and purposes. But the imputed murder of his uncle Gloster might well put Bolingbroke upon apprehending that Norfolk's seeming confidence was all feigned for the purpose of drawing him into some act or speech that might be turned to his destruction. It is true, Norfolk himself also, along with Bolingbroke and others, had borne a part in those same treasonable proceedings for which Gloster was impeached; but he now stood high, apparently, in the King's favour; and in his possession of the whole secret touching Gloster's death he had a strong pledge of the King's fidelity to him. Richard was bound to Norfolk as his instrument, Norfolk was bound to Richard as his principal, in that dark transaction; neither could betray the other without exposing himself. But this was a very perilous combination. Bolingbroke's astute, penetrating, determined spirit saw how to be master of the situation. He could not attack the principal directly, but he could attack him through the instrument. Thus Gloster's death became Bolingbroke's opportunity.

The play fitly opens with Bolingbroke's accusation and challenge of Norfolk; the forecited points of history not forming any part of the action, nor being stated directly, but only implied, sometimes not very clearly, in various notes of dramatic retrospection. Richard tries his utmost to reconcile the parties; for he knows full well that himself is the real mark aimed at in the appellant's charges

and defiance; but he is forced alike by his position and his conscience to dissemble that knowledge, and to take Bolingbroke at his word. On the other side, Bolingbroke's behaviour throughout is also a piece of profound and well-acted dissimulation: he understands the King's predicament perfectly; knows that he dare not avow his thoughts, lest he stand self-convicted in the matter charged. So he has both Richard and Norfolk penned up in a dilemma from which they can nowise escape but by letting out the whole truth, and thus giving him a clear victory. He knows they are completely in his toils; his keen sagacity pierces the heart of their situation: nor does his energy lag behind his insight; naturally bold and resolute, his boldness and resolution now spring at the game in conscious strength: he is ambitious of power, he resents his uncle's death, he loves his country; and his ambition, his resentment, his patriotism, all combine to string him up for decisive action: he has got a firm twist on the wrong-doers, and is fully determined either to twist them off their legs or to perish in the attempt. And observe what a note of terror he strikes into Richard when, referring to the spilling of Gloster's blood, he declares,

> "Which blood, like sacrificing Abel's, cries,
> Even from the tongueless caverns of the earth,
> To me for justice and rough chastisement;
> And, by the glorious worth of my descent,
> This arm shall do it, or this life be spent."

The little words *to me*, falling in here with such quiet emphasis, are a stern warning to the guilty parties, that the speaker has assumed the office of avenger, and will not falter in the work. How well the sense of them is taken, appears in the King's exclamation, "How high a pitch his resolution soars!" It is to be understood withal, that Norfolk has now come to be the King's main supporter in his career of misrule. Bolingbroke forecasts that, Norfolk once hewn out of the way, Richard will then have to cast in his lot with those who have neither wasted the land with

rapacity nor washed their hands in unrighteous blood. Then too he reckons upon having himself a voice potential in the royal counsels; and he already has it in mind that the race of cormorant upstarts and parasites and suckers who have so long preyed upon the State shall make a speedy end.

Such, I think, is clearly the dramatic purpose and significance of the opening scene, which has been diversely interpreted by several critics, who, it seems to me, have not fully entered into its bearing, prospective and retrospective, on the action of the play. Coleridge, for instance, thinks the Poet's aim in so beginning the piece was to bring out the characters of Richard and Bolingbroke; while Courtenay holds him to have made the opening thus, not from any dramatic purpose, but merely because he found the matter so ordered in the chronicle. Gervinus, again, thinks that Shakespeare "began with this scene, because it was just the beginning of all the sufferings which fell upon the King, and afterwards upon his dethroners." The views of both Coleridge and Gervinus are doubtless right, as far as they go: but I think the *chief* object of the scene is to unfold, in its various bearings, direct and remote, the *dramatic relation* of the two leading persons. Accordingly, out of this relation as there set forth the whole action of the play is made to proceed.

The King's course in arresting the quarrel just as it is coming to the upshot, and in sending both parties into exile, is very cunning, though perhaps in a rather small way. He thus gets rid of the whole question for the present, and saves himself from falling into the hands of either side: Bolingbroke's scheme is baffled, and his purpose indefinitely postponed: withal the act wears a look of fairness and impartiality, so that public discontent cannot well find where to stick upon it. As matters stand, even Norfolk's help is likely to prove a hindrance to the King; he has a firm hold upon him through the secret that lies between them: on the other hand, Richard has found in Bolingbroke an an-

tagonist whom he dares not cope with, and can nowise conciliate but by arming him with a still greater obstructive power. So, by thus playing them off against each other, he seems to have shaken himself clear at once from a troublesome friend and a dangerous foe: at all events, as he views the thing, he can well afford to purchase a riddance from so formidable an assailant by the loss of his ablest defender. For Richard's main difficulty, in the play as in history, is, that he feels unable to stand without props, and yet is too weak or too wayward to lean upon any but such as are weaker than himself: none are for him but those who pander to his wilfulness; creatures at once greedy and prodigal, and who have no strength to help him but what they suck out of him.

Richard is evidently not a little elated at the stratagem of banishment: he flatters himself with having devised a master-stroke of policy which is to make him stronger than ever. Both the clog of Norfolk's friendship and the dread of Bolingbroke's enmity are now, as he thinks, effectually removed. After such a triumph, he presumes that none will dare to call the oppressions and abuses of his government to account. Thus he arrogates to himself entire impunity in whatever he may please to do, and so is emboldened to fresh excesses of misrule. He has just been put in a very tight place, as many believed; but he has proved too much for those who put him there; has adroitly turned the tables upon them, and disconcerted their well-laid plans: at least so he thinks, and the thought fills him with delight. Though he has cut down the term of Bolingbroke's exile to six years, it is with a secret purpose that the exile shall never return; and he trusts that the same king-craft which has extricated him from so sharp a dilemma will carry him safe through any plots, however dark and treacherous, which he may frame for putting the man out of the way. But, in his exhilaration of seeming success, he cannot keep his thoughts to himself; he must still feed his self-applause by blurting them out to his favorites,

instead of leaving them to be gathered after the work is done. For so, among his other weaknesses, he has an incurable leakiness of mind, so that he must still be prating of designs which he hardly ought to breathe aloud even to himself. He has indeed a good deal of practical cunning, and is endowed with no mean powers of intellect; but somehow he can never so weave his intellectual forces together as to make them hold water: hence he is ever stumbling over schemes which he has himself spilt in advance.

It is hardly worth the while to draw any further outline of the historical matter which the Poet had before him, since both the form and order of events are substantially the same in the play as in Holinshed. The chronicler of course had not the art, nor did it fall within his purpose, to give a lifelike portraiture of the persons; yet in respect of these Shakespeare is no less true to fact than in the events; informing the bald diagrams of the historian with vital spirit and efficacy, and thus enabling us not so much to hear or read *about* the men of a former age, as to see them passing before us. Hints to that purpose there are indeed in the narrative; but these for the most part are so slight, and so overlaid with other matter, that perhaps no eye but Shakespeare's could have detected them and drawn forth their secret meaning. And in many such cases he seems to have used a kind of poetical or psychological comparative anatomy; reconstructing the whole order and complexion of characteristic traits from a few fragments, such as would have escaped any perception less apprehensive and quick than his. So that, looking through his eyes, we can now see things in the chronicler that we could never have discerned with our own. It is almost as if from a fossil thumb-nail or tooth or lock of hair one should reproduce the entire mental, moral, and physical structure of the man to whom it belonged. Such appears to have been the Poet's fineness of faculty! Therewithal the laws of fact

seem to sit as easy upon him as those of imagination: within the hard, stiff lines of historical truth, his creative powers move with as much freedom, facility, and grace, as when owning no restraints but such as are self-imposed.

It is probably on some such ground as this that Coleridge, speaking of *King Richard the Second*, says he "feels no hesitation in placing it as the first and most admirable of all Shakespeare's purely historical plays." For, in all the qualities of a work of art merely, or as an instance of dramatic architecture and delineation, it is much inferior to the First and Second Parts of *King Henry the Fourth*. But these are specimens of the *mixed* drama; that is, dramas consisting partly of historical, partly of ideal, delineations; though the latter are indeed used as the vehicle of a larger moral history than were otherwise compatible with the laws of dramatic reason. In *King Richard the Second*, on the other hand, *all* the prominent delineations are historical; with but one exception, no interest, no incidents, of any other kind, are admitted: so that, as Coleridge adds, "it is perhaps the most purely historical of Shakespeare's dramas." And he justly argues, that it is not merely the having historical matter, but the peculiar relation which this matter bears to the plot, that makes a drama properly historical. *Macbeth*, for instance, has much of historical matter, yet is in no proper sense an historical drama, because the history neither forms nor guides, but only *subserves* the plot. Nor, again, does the having much besides historical matter keep a drama from being truly historical, provided the history orders and governs the plot. So that both *King Richard the Second* and *King Henry the Fourth* are in the strictest sense historical plays; the difference between them being, that in the former the history furnishes the whole matter and order of the work; while in the latter it furnishes a part, and at the same time shapes and directs whatever is added by the creative imagination. Thus, in a purely historical drama, the history makes the plot; in a mixed, it directs the plot; in such

tragedies as *King Lear* and *Macbeth*, it subserves the plot.

The play in hand has been justly extolled by several of the most judicious critics as embodying a very profound and comprehensive scheme of political philosophy. Shakespeare was certainly no less a master in this high province of thought than in the exercise of the creative and representative imagination. The just limits and conditions of sovereign authority and of individual right, and how all the parts of the body politic should stand in mutual intelligence and interdependence, were as "things familiar and acquainted" to his all-gifted and serenely-tempered mind. He was indeed a mighty workman, if the world ever saw one. And his mightiness in the grounds and principles of man's social being is especially conspicuous in this drama. What rightly "constitutes a State"; "the degrees by which true sway doth mount"; "the stalk true power doth grow on"; and that "reverence is a loyal virtue, never sown in haste, nor springing with a transient shower"; — these lessons are here unfolded with a depth and largeness of wisdom, and with a harmony and fruitfulness of impression, that cannot be too highly praised. Almost every scene contains matter that craves and repays the closest study.

The play forecasts, vividly yet sedately, the long series of civil crimes and slaughters of which Richard's reign was in fact the seed-plot. These forecastings, however, so far as they come to verbal expression, are fitly put into the mouths of the King and the Bishop of Carlisle, men whose personal interests and settled prepossessions make them strongly averse to the events in progress; while the persons engaged in driving those events forward are touched by no warnings or misgivings in that kind, because with them all such forebodings of distant evil are naturally lost in their resentment of the wrongs that have been done, and in the hopes that dance before them in the path they are

treading. But, besides this, the same forecast is also placed silently in the general drift and action of the piece; which infers the whole workmanship to have been framed with that far-stretching train and progeny of evils consciously in view.

But the most noteworthy point in this matter is the Poet's calmness and equipoise of judgment. In the strife of factions and the conflict of principles, he utters, or rather lets the several persons utter, in the extremest forms, their mutually-oppugnant views, yet without either committing himself to any of them or betraying any disapproval of them. He understands not only when and how far the persons are wrong in what they say or do, but also why they cannot understand it: so he holds the balance even between justice to the men and justice to the truth; for he knows very well how apt men are to be at fault in their opinions while upright in their aims. The claims of legitimacy and of revolution, of divine right, personal merit, and public choice, the doctrines of the monarchical, the aristocratic, the popular origin of the State, — all these are by turns urged in their most rational or most plausible aspects, but merely in the order and on the footing of dramatic propriety, the Poet himself discovering no preferences or repugnances concerning them. So in this play the dialogue throws out timber from which many diverse theories of government may be framed: and various political and philosophical sects may here meet together, and wrangle out their opposite tenets with themes and quotations drawn from the Poet's pages; just as his persons themselves wrangled out, with words or arms or both, the questions upon which they were actually divided. Nor does he in any sort play or affect to play the part of umpire between the wranglers: which of them has the truth, or the better cause, — this, like a firm commissioner, so to speak, of Providence, he leaves to appear silently in the ultimate sum-total of results. And so imperturbable is his fairness, so unswerving his impartiality, as almost to seem the offspring

of a heartless and cynical indifference. Hence a French writer, Chasles, sets him down as "chiefly remarkable for a judgment so high, so firm, so uncompromising, that one is wellnigh tempted to impeach his coldness, and to find in this impassible observer something that may almost be called cruel towards the human race. In the historical pieces," continues he, "the picturesque, rapid, and vehement genius which produced them seems to bow before the higher law of a judgment almost ironical in its clear-sightedness. Sensibility to impressions, the ardent force of imagination, the eloquence of passion, — these brilliant gifts of nature, which would seem destined to draw a poet beyond all limits, are subordinated in this extraordinary intelligence to a calm and almost deriding sagacity, that pardons nothing and forgets nothing."

The moral and political lessons designed in this piece run out into completeness in the later plays of the series, and so are to be mainly gathered from them. Here we have the scarce-perceptible germs of consequences which blossom and go to seed there; these consequences being scattered all along down the sequent years till nearly a century after, when the last of the Plantagenets met his death in Bosworth-field. Those lessons are found, not only transpiring inaudibly through the events and actions of the pieces that follow, but also in occasional notes of verbal discourse; as in the Second Part of *King Henry the Fourth*, iii. 1, where Bolingbroke, worried almost to death with the persevering enmity of the Percys, so pointedly remembers the prediction of Richard:

> "Northumberland, thou ladder wherewithal
> The mounting Bolingbroke ascends my throne,
> The time shall not be many hours of age
> More than it is, ere foul sin gathering head
> Shall break into corruption: thou shalt think,
> Though he divide the realm, and give thee half,
> It is too little, helping him to all;
> And he shall think that thou, which know'st the way
> To plant unrightful kings, wilt know again,

> Being ne'er so little urg'd, another way
> To pluck him headlong from th' usurpèd throne.
> The love of wicked friends converts to fear;
> That fear to hate."

And the same thing comes out again, perhaps still more impressively, in the fact that Bolingbroke's conscience, when king, arms the irregularities of his son with the stings of a providential retribution: though aware of Prince Henry's noble qualities, and of the encouragement they offer, yet the remembrance of what himself has done fills him with apprehensions of the worst; so that he looks upon the Prince as "only mark'd for the hot vengeance and the rod of Heaven to punish his mistreadings."

The King and Bolingbroke are among the wisest and strongest of Shakespeare's historical delineations. Both are drawn at full length, and without omission of a feature or lineament that could anywise help us towards a thorough knowledge of the men; so far, that is, as regards the argument and action of the piece.

All through the first three Acts, Richard appears pretty thoroughly despicable, insomuch that it seems hardly possible he should ever rally to his side any honest stirrings either of pity or respect. He is at once crafty and credulous, indolent and arrogant, effeminate and aggressive; a hollow trifler while Fortune smiles, a wordy whimperer when she frowns. His utter falseness of heart in taking order for the combat, while secretly bent on preventing it; his arbitrary freakishness in letting it proceed till the combatants are on the point of crossing their lances, and then peremptorily arresting it; his petulant tyranny in passing the sentence of banishment on both the men, and his nervous, timid apprehensiveness in exacting from them an oath not to have any correspondence during their exile; his mean, scoffing insolence to the broken-hearted Gaunt, his ostentatious scorn of the dying man's reproofs, his impious levity in wishing him a speedy death, and his imperious,

headlong contempt of justice, and even of his own plighted faith, in seizing the Lancaster estates to his own use before the "time-honour'd Lancaster" is in the grave; — these things mark him out as a thorough-paced profligate, at once lawless and imbecile, who glories in spurning at whatever is held most sacred by all true men.

Richard's character indeed, both as delivered in history and as drawn in the play, is mainly that of a pampered and emasculated voluptuary, presumptuous, hollow-hearted, prodigal, who cannot be got to harbour the idea that the nation exists for any purpose but to serve his private will and pleasure, and who thinks to divorce the rights and immunities of the crown from its cares and duties and legitimate honours. All this had the effect of bringing his personal character into contempt even before his administration became generally disliked. So Hume describes him as "indolent, profuse, addicted to low pleasures, spending his whole time in feasting and jollity, and dissipating, in idle show, or in bounties to favourites of no reputation, that revenue which the people expected to see him employ in enterprises directed to public honour and advantage." As already intimated, strong and independent supports he will nowise endure; and as he cannot live without supports of some kind, so he takes to climbing plants, "that seem in eating him to hold him up," and finally pull him to the ground. Such being his disposition, he naturally affects the society of befrilled and capering sprigs; and so draws about him a set of spendthrift minions, who stop his ear with flatteries, and inflame his blood with libidinous fancies; who make him insolent, imperious, and deaf to the voice of sober counsel and admonition, and draw him into a shallow and frivolous aping of foreign manners and fashions. Among his other traits of wantonness is an eager, restless haunting of public places and scenes of promiscuous familiarity; thus making himself "stale and cheap to vulgar company," till he grows "common-hackney'd in the eyes of men," so that, even "when he has occasion to be seen, he

is but as the cuckoo is in June, heard, not regarded," and men hang their eyelids down before him, "being with his presence glutted, gorg'd, and full." This matter, to be sure, is not brought forward in the present play, and is perhaps rightly withheld, lest it should too much turn away our sympathies from the King in his hours of humiliation and sorrow; but it is aptly urged by Bolingbroke in the following piece, when he remonstrates with the Prince against those idle courses which seem likely to bring him into a similar predicament:

> "The skipping King, he ambled up and down
> With shallow jesters and rash bavin wits,
> Soon kindled and soon burn'd; carded his state,
> Mingled his royalty, with capering fools;
> Had his great name profanèd with their scorns;
> And gave his countenance, against his name,
> To laugh at gibing boys, and stand the push
> Of every beardless vain comparative;
> Grew a companion to the common streets:
> That, being daily swallow'd by men's eyes,
> They surfeited with honey, and began
> To loathe the taste of sweetness, whereof a little
> More than a little is by much too much."

Nevertheless Richard has in detail the parts, mental, moral, and practical, of a well-rounded manhood; and his endowments, severally regarded, are not without a fair measure both of strength and beauty: but there seems to be no principle of cohesion or concert among them; so that he acts in each of them by turns, never in all of them, hardly ever in two of them, at once. He thus moves altogether by fits and starts, and must still be in an excess, now on one side, now on another; and this because the tempering and moderating power of judgment is wanting; in a word, he has no *equilibrium:* a thought strikes him, and whirls him far off to the right, where another thought strikes him, and whirls him as far off to the left; and so he goes pitching and zigzagging hither and thither. This is not specially constitutional with him, but mainly the result

of bad education and an unconscientious way of life. In his case, the discipline of order and virtue has been forestalled by a planting of loose and giddy thoughts; and long indulgence in voluptuous arts, and the instilled poison of wanton imaginations, have dissolved the bands of self-restraint, and induced a habit of setting pleasure before duty, and of making reason wait on passion; and this has wrought a certain chronic sleaziness into his texture, and rendered him more and more the sport of contradictory impulses and humours.

Richard is not without bright and just thoughts, but he cannot for any length of time maintain a reasonable propriety of thought. Hence his discourse presents a strange medley of sense and puerility; and we often have a gem of mind or a beautiful image with a childish platitude treading on its heels. So too he is lofty and abject, pious and profane, bold and pusillanimous, by fits; has spasms of elation swiftly alternating with spasms of dejection, and is ever running through the gamut of sharps and flats; "every feeling being abandoned for its direct opposite upon the pressure of external accident." This supreme trait of weakness is most tellingly displayed in his dialogue with Carlisle, Aumerle, Salisbury, and Scroop, just after his return from Ireland, when, upon learning how Bolingbroke is carrying all before him, he vibrates so rapidly between the extremes of ungrounded hope and unmanly despair. His spirit soars in the faith that, for every man in arms with Bolingbroke, "God for His Richard hath in heavenly pay a glorious angel"; but when, a moment after, he finds that, so far from angels mustering to his aid, even men are deserting him, all his faith instantly vanishes in pale-faced terror and dismay.

Therewithal he is ever inviting hostile designs by openly anticipating them, or by futile or ill-judged precautions against them. So in his swearing the two banished Dukes not to plot or join hands against him during their exile. So too when Bolingbroke comes, avowedly and with just

cause, to reclaim his own, and to redress the bleeding State; he discovers no purpose of grasping the crown, till Richard's weak-kneed concession or acquiescence puts it in his mind, and fairly wooes him to it; that is, the King presumes the design is to unseat him, and thereby prompts it. Thus the apprehension of being deposed, instead of stiffening up his manly parts, at once deposes his intellect and spirit. When a bold and resolute self-assertion, or a manly and stout-hearted defiance would outdare and avert the peril, he just quails and cowers; and his deprecating of the blow before it comes is a tacit pledge of submission when it comes. He himself tells Bolingbroke, "they well deserve to have, that know the strong'st and surest way to get"; while his behaviour just illustrates how they deserve not to have, who use the strong'st and surest way to lose.

But perhaps the most mark-worthy point in his character is, that the prospect or the pressure of adversity or distress, instead of kindling any strain of manhood in him, or of having any bracing and toning effect upon his soul, only melts it into a kind of sentimental pulp. Suffering does not even develop the virtue of passive fortitude in him: at its touch, he forthwith abandons himself to a course of passionate weakness. And he is so steeped in voluptuous habits, that he must needs be a voluptuary even in his sorrow, and make a luxury of woe itself: pleasure has so thoroughly mastered his spirit, that he cannot think of bearing pain as a duty or an honour, but merely as a license for the pleasure of maudlin self-compassion: so he hangs over his griefs, hugs them, nurses them, buries himself in them, as if the sweet agony thereof were to him a glad refuge from the stings of self-reproach, or a dear release from the exercise of manly thought. This, I take it, is the true explanation of the fact, that when he is sick in fortune, and sees "the world is not his friend, nor the world's law," he forthwith turns a moralistic day-dreamer and fancy-monger, and goes to spending his wits in a sort of holiday of poetical, self-brooding tearfulness. His spirit wantons in running self-

pleasing divisions upon sadness, as if to beguile the sense and memory of his follies and crimes. And such an ingenious working of sentimental embroidery is perhaps the natural resort of a profligate without means.

It is also to be noted that in his reverse of fortune Richard's mind is altogether self-centred; and he is so becharmed with his self-pity, that he has no thought to spare for those whom his fall has dragged down into ruin along with him. But this is only part and parcel of his general character; which is that of "a mind deeply reflective in its misfortunes, but wanting the guide to all sound reflection, — the power of going out of himself, under the conduct of a loftier reason than could endure to dwell upon the merely personal." In this respect, one may well be tempted to run a parallel, as indeed Hazlitt has done, between Richard the Second and Henry the Sixth as drawn by Shakespeare. The two Kings closely resemble each other in a certain weakness of character bordering on effeminacy; and this resemblance is made specially apparent by their similarity of state and fortune. Yet this similarity seems to have put the Poet upon a more careful discrimination of the men. Richard is as selfish as he is weak, and weak partly because of his selfishness. With goodly powers of mind, still his thinking never runs clear of self, but is all steeped to the core in personal regards; he reads men and things altogether through the medium of his own wishes and desires. And because his thoughts do not rise out of self, and stay in the contemplation of general truth, therefore it is that his course of life runs so tearingly a-clash with the laws and conditions of his place. With Henry, on the other hand, disinterestedness is pushed to the degree of an infirmity. He seems to perceive and own truth all the more willingly where it involves a sacrifice of his personal interests and rights. But a man, especially a king, cannot be wise for others, unless he be so for himself. Thus Henry's weakness seems to spring in part from an excessive disregard of self. He permits the laws to suffer,

and in them the people, partly because he cannot vindicate them without, in effect, taking care of his own cause. And when others break their oaths to him, he blames his own remissness as having caused them to wrong themselves.

But Richard is at last felt to be the victim as well as the author of wrong; and the Poet evidently did not mean that the wrongs he has done should lie so heavy upon us as to preclude commiseration for the wrong he suffers. Our sympathies are indeed deeply moved in the wretched man's behalf. This, I suppose, is because the spectacle of fallen greatness, of humiliation, and distress, however merited, is a natural object of pity; while, again, honest pity naturally magnetizes other sentiments into unison with itself. The heart must be hard indeed that does not respond to the pathos of York's account of the discrowned monarch's ride into London:

> "No man cried, *God save him!*
> No joyful tongue gave him his welcome home;
> But dust was thrown upon his sacred head;
> Which with such gentle sorrow he shook off, —
> His face still combating with tears and smiles,
> The badges of his grief and patience, —
> That, had not God, for some strong purpose, steel'd
> The hearts of men, they must perforce have melted,
> And barbarism itself have pitied him."

And it is rather surprising how much he redeems himself in our thoughts by his manly outburst of resentment in the parliament-scene, when the sneaking Northumberland so meanly persecutes him to "ravel out his weav'd-up follies." Then too his faults and infirmities are so much those of our common humanity, that even through them he creeps into our affections, and spins round us the ties of brotherhood. Nor, in truth, is his character without beautiful parts; and when affliction brings these out, as night does the stars, he puts forth claims to gentle regard which the judgment is no less prompt to ratify than the heart to own.

In collision with such a compact, close-knit, sure-footed structure as Bolingbroke, it is no wonder that Richard's brittle, stumbling, loose-jointed fabric soon goes to pieces. In one of his paroxysms of regal conceit, he flatters himself that "not all the water in the rough-rude sea can wash the balm from an anointed king"; but his fate is a pregnant warning that in the eye of Heaven, ay, and of men too, a king can wash off his own consecration by flagitious, persistent misgovernment, and can effectually discrown himself by prostituting the intrusted symbol of a nation's sovereignty into an instrument of wilful and despotic self-indulgence. Richard has thought to stand secure in the strength of his good right, and would not see how this might be practically annulled by bad use. By not respecting his great office, he has taught the people to despise his person, and has set them to longing for a man in his place who will be a king in soul as well as in title. Thus the king by inheritance finds himself hopelessly unkinged in an unequal struggle with a king by nature and merit.

Bolingbroke is obviously the moving and controlling spirit of the drama. Every thing waits upon his firm-set and tranquil potency of will, and is made alive with his silent, inly-working efficacy of thought and purpose. He sets the action on foot, shapes its whole course, and ties up all its lines at the close; himself riding, in calm and conscious triumph, the whirlwind he has had a hand in raising. Bold, crafty, humble, and aspiring, he is also brimful of energy, yet has all his forces thoroughly in hand, so that he uses them, and is never mastered by them. His vessel is so well-timbered and so tight-built, that it never springs a-leak; either from nature or from purpose, perhaps from both, he takes the way of spreading himself by deeds, not by discourse; plans industriously, but says nothing about it; and as he prates not of his mental whereabout, so you never know what he is thinking of or driving at, till his thoughts have compassed their drift, and overtaken their ends: consequently he remains throughout the play an

enigma both to the other persons and to us. At once ardent and self-restrained, far-sighted, firmly poised, always eying his mark steadily, and ever working towards it stealthily, he knows perfectly withal how to abide his time: he sees the opportunity clearly while it is coming, and seizes it promptly when it comes; but does all this so quietly as to seem the mere servant of events, and not at all the worker of them. He is undoubtedly ambitious of the crown, expects to have it, means to get it, and frames his action to that end; but he builds both the ambition and the expectation on his knowledge of Richard's character and his own political insight: reading the signs of the time with a statesman's eye, he knows that things are hastening towards a crisis in the State; as he also knows that they will be apt to make an end the sooner, if left to their natural course: nor, after all, is it so correct to say that he forces the crown away from Richard, as that he lets Richard's fitful, jerking impotence shake it off into his hand; though it must be owned that he takes, and knows he is taking, just the right way to stimulate Richard's convulsive zigzaggery into fatal action.

Bolingbroke, throughout the play, appears framed of qualities at once attractive and commanding. In the sequent play, the tempestuous Hotspur denounces him as a "vile politician." A politician he is indeed, but he is much more than that. He is a conscious adept and a willing practiser in the ways of popularity; and if there is much of artfulness in his condescension, there is much of genuineness too: for he knows that the strength of the throne must stand in having the hearts of the people knit to it; and in his view the tribute of a winning address, or of gracious and obliging behaviour, may be honestly and wisely paid, to purchase their honest affection. Therewithal he is a master of just that proud complaisance and benignant loftiness, that happy mixture of affability and reserve, which makes its way most surely to the seat of popular confidence and respect. Nor does his courtship of the people ever forget

that their love will keep the longer and the better for being so seasoned with reverence as to stop short of familiarity: for this cause, he offers himself seldom to their eyes; and when he thus offers himself, he does it so sparingly as to make their eyes glad of the sight without glutting them; and does it in such a way, that their love of the man may in no sort melt down their awe of the prince. The way he sweetens himself into their good thoughts, by smiling and bowing his farewell pleasantness upon them when leaving for his place of exile, has its best showing in Richard's description, —

> "How he did seem to dive into their hearts
> With humble and familiar courtesy;
> What reverence he did throw away on slaves;
> Wooing poor craftsmen with the craft of smiles,
> And patient under-bearing of his fortune.
> Off goes his bonnet to an oyster-wench;
> A brace of draymen bid God speed him well,
> And had the tribute of his supple knee,
> With *Thanks, my countrymen, my loving friends.*"

Bolingbroke's departure is with the port and bearing of a conscious victor in the issue he has made. He knows that the hearts of the people are going with him, and that his power at home will strike its roots the deeper for the rough wind of tyranny which blows him abroad, where he must "sigh his English breath in foreign clouds, eating the bitter bread of banishment." From that moment, he sees that the crown is in reversion his; and the inspiration of these forward-looking thoughts is one cause why he throws such winning blandness and compliance into his parting salutations. And on coming back to reclaim his plundered inheritance, instead of waiting for a formal settlement of rights and titles, no sooner is he landed than he quietly assumes the functions, and goes to doing the works, of sovereignty, while disclaiming the office and all pretensions to it. In their long experience of a king without kingliness, the people have had enough of the name without the thing: so he proceeds to enact the thing without the name.

Men thus get used to seeing kingly acts done by him, and grow warm with the sense of public benefits resulting therefrom, without understanding clearly that they are such; that is, they are made to feel the presence of a real king inside of him, before they know it. In this way, he literally *steals* the sentiment of loyalty into them; while his approved kingliness of spirit reinvests the title with its old dearness and lustre, and at the same time points him out as the rightful wearer of it. Being thus a king in fact, though not in name and outward show, the sentiments that have been wont to go with the crown silently draw together and centre upon him; and when this is done the crown itself naturally gravitates towards his head. Whether the man consciously designs all this, may indeed be questioned; but such is clearly the natural drift and upshot of the course he pursues.

Nor is his bearing towards the lords who gather round him less remarkable. During their long ride together, he cheats the tediousness of the road with his sweetness and affability of discourse, thus winning and fastening them to his cause, yet without so committing himself to them as to give them any foothold for lording it over him. The overweening Percys, from the importance of their aid, evidently reckon upon being a power behind the throne greater than the throne; but they are not long in finding they have mistaken their man. So in the deposition-scene, when the insolent Northumberland thinks to rule the crestfallen King by dint of browbeating, Bolingbroke quietly overrules him; and he does this so much in the spirit of one born to command, as to make it evident that the reign of favouritism is at an end. He is not unmindful that those who have engaged in rebellion to set him up may do the same again to pluck him down: therefore he is the prompter to let them know that, instead of being his master, they have given themselves a master in him, and that, if he has used their services in establishing his throne, he has done so as their King, and not as their creature. And as he has no

notion of usurping the crown by their help in order that they may rule the State with a king under them; so neither is he wanting in magnanimity to the brave old Bishop of Carlisle, whose honest, outspoken, uncompromising loyalty to Richard draws from him a reproof indeed, but in language so restrained and temperate as to show that he honours the man much more than he resents the act. The same nobleness of spirit, or, if you please, politic generosity, is evinced again in his declared purpose of recalling Norfolk, and reinstating him in his lands and honours; and perhaps still better in the scene where he pardons Aumerle, and where, while the old Duke and Duchess of York are pleading with all their might, the one against, the other for, their son's life, he gently plays with the occasion, and defers the word, though his mind is made up, and at last gratifies the father by denying his suit, and binds all three of their hearts indissolubly to himself by a wise act of mercy the more engaging for his stern justice to the other conspirators.

And so the way Bolingbroke kings it all through the fourth and fifth Acts, sparing of words, but prompt and vigorous, yet temperate and prudent in deed, makes a forcible contrast to Richard's froward, violent, imbecile tyrannizing in the first and second. As for the murder of Richard, this is indeed an execrable thing; but there is the less need of remarking upon it, inasmuch as Bolingbroke's professed abhorrence of the deed and remorse for having hinted it, whether sincere or not, sufficiently mark it out for reprobation. Of course the proximate cause of it is the conspiracy which has come to light for restoring the deposed King, and which has cost the lives of several men. The death of those men is, in the circumstances, just. And the fact that Richard's life thus holds Bolingbroke in constant peril of assassination amply explains why the latter should wish the ground and motive for such plots removed, though it may nowise excuse the means used for stopping off that peril. But in truth the head and spring of all these evils lies in the usurpation; and for this Richard is quite as much to blame as Bolingbroke.

KING HENRY THE FOURTH.

Dr. Johnson rightly observes that the First and Second Parts of King Henry the Fourth are substantially one drama, the whole being arranged as two only because too long to be one. For this cause it seems best to regard them as one in what follows, and so dispose of them both together. The writing of them must be placed at least as early as 1597, when the author was thirty-three years old. The First Part was registered at the Stationers' for publication in February, 1598, and was published in the course of that year. There were also four other quarto issues of the play before the folio edition of 1623. The Second Part was first published in 1600, and there is not known to have been any other edition of it till it reappeared along with the First Part in the folio. It is pretty certain, however, for reasons to be stated presently, that the Second Part was written before the entry of the First Part at the Stationers' in 1598.

It is beyond question that the original name of Sir John Falstaff was Sir John Oldcastle; and a curious relic of that naming survives in Act i. scene 2, where the Prince calls Falstaff "my *old* lad of the *castle*." And we have several other strong proofs of the fact; as in the Epilogue to the Second Part: "For any thing I know, Falstaff shall die of a sweat, unless already he be killed with your hard opinions; for Oldcastle died a martyr, and this is not the man." Also, in *Amends for Ladies*, a play by Nathaniel Field, printed in 1618: "Did you never see the play where the *fat Knight*, hight *Oldcastle*, did tell you truly what this honour was?" which clearly alludes to Falstaff's soliloquy about honour in the First Part, Act v. scene 1. Yet the change of name must have been made before the play was entered in the Stationers' books, as that entry mentions "the conceited mirth of Sir John *Falstaff*." And we have one small but pretty decisive mark inferring

the Second Part to have been written before that change was made: in the quarto edition of this Part, Act i. scene 2, one of Falstaff's speeches has the prefix *Old;* the change in that instance being probably left unmarked in the printer's copy. All which shows that both Parts were originally written long enough before February, 1598, for the author to see cause for changing the name.

"Sir John Oldcastle, the good Lord Cobham," was much distinguished as a Wickliffite martyr, and his name was held in high reverence by the Protestants in Shakespeare's time. And the purpose of the change in question probably was to rescue his memory from the profanations of the stage. Thus much seems hinted in the forecited passage from the Epilogue, and is further approved by what Fuller says in his *Church History:* "Stage-poets have themselves been very bold with, and others very merry at, the memory of Sir John Oldcastle, whom they have fancied a boon companion, a jovial royster, and a coward to boot. The best is, Sir John Falstaff hath relieved the memory of Sir John Oldcastle, and is substituted buffoon in his place."

Another motive for the change may have been the better to distinguish Shakespeare's play from *The Famous Victories of Henry the Fifth;* a play which had been on the stage some years, and wherein Sir John Oldcastle was among the names of the *Dramatis Personæ*, as were also Ned and Gadshill. There is no telling with any certainty when or by whom *The Famous Victories* was written. It is known to have been on the boards as early as 1588, because one of the parts was acted by Tarlton, the celebrated comedian, who died that year. And Nash, in his *Pierce Penniless*, 1592, thus alludes to it: "What a glorious thing it is to have Henry the Fifth represented on the stage, leading the French King prisoner, and forcing him and the Dauphin to swear fealty." It was also entered at the Stationers' in 1594; and a play called *Harry the Fifth*, probably the same, was performed in 1595; and not less than three editions of it were printed. All which tells

strongly for its success and popularity. The action of the play extends over the whole time occupied by Shakespeare's *King Henry the Fourth* and *King Henry the Fifth*. The Poet can hardly be said to have built upon it or borrowed from it at all, any further than taking the above-mentioned names. The play is indeed a most wretched and worthless performance; being altogether a mass of stupid vulgarity; at once vapid and vile; without the least touch of wit in the comic parts, or of poetry in the tragic; the verse being such only to the eye; Sir John Oldcastle being a dull, low-minded profligate, uninformed with the slightest felicity of thought or humour; the Prince, an irredeemable compound of ruffian, blackguard, and hypocrite; and their companions, the fitting seconds of such principals: so that to have drawn upon it for any portion or element of Shakespeare's *King Henry the Fourth* were much the same as "extracting sunbeams from cucumbers."

In these plays, as in others of the same class, the Poet's authority was Holinshed, whose *Chronicles*, first published in 1577, was then the favourite book in English history. And the plays, notwithstanding their wealth of ideal matter, are rightly called historical, because the history everywhere *guides*, and in a good measure *forms*, the plot, whereas *Macbeth*, for instance, though having much of historical matter, is rightly called a tragedy, as the history merely *subserves* the plot.

King Henry the Fourth, surnamed Bolingbroke from the place of his birth, came to the throne in 1399, having first deposed his cousin, Richard the Second, whose death he was generally thought to have procured shortly after. The chief agents in this usurpation were the Percys, known in history as Northumberland, Worcester, and Hotspur, three haughty and turbulent noblemen, who afterwards troubled Henry to keep the crown as much as they had helped him in getting it.

The lineal heir to the crown next after Richard was

Edmund Mortimer, Earl of March, a lad then about seven years old, whom the King held in a sort of honourable custody. Early in his reign, one of the King's leading partisans in Wales went to insulting and oppressing Owen Glendower, a chief of that country, who had been trained up in the English Court. Glendower petitioned for redress, and was insultingly denied; whereupon he took the work of redress into his own hands. Sir Edmund Mortimer, uncle to the young Earl of March, and brother to Hotspur's wife, was sent against him; but his forces were utterly broken, and himself captured and held in close confinement by Glendower, where the King suffered him to lie unransomed, alleging that he had treacherously allowed himself to be taken. Shakespeare, however, following Holinshed, makes the young Earl, who was then detained at Windsor to have been Glendower's prisoner.

After the captivity of Mortimer the King led three armies in succession against Glendower, and was as often baffled by the valour or the policy of the Welshman. At length the elements made war on the King; his forces were storm-stricken, blown to pieces by tempests; which bred a general belief that Glendower could "command the Devil," and "call spirits from the vasty deep." The King finally gave up and withdrew; but still consoled himself that he yielded, not to the arms, but to the magic arts of his antagonist.

In the beginning of his reign the King led an army into Scotland, and summoned the Scottish King to appear before him and do homage for his crown; but, finding that the Scots would neither submit nor fight, and being pressed by famine, he gave over the undertaking and retired. Some while after, Earl Douglas, at the head of ten thousand men, burst into England, and advanced as far as Newcastle, spreading terror and havoc around him. On their return they were met by the Percys at Homildon where, after a fierce and bloody battle, the Scots were totally routed; Douglas himself being captured, as were also many other

Scottish noblemen, and among them the Earl of Fife, a prince of the blood royal. The most distinguished of the English leaders in this affair was Henry Percy, surnamed Hotspur; a man of the most restless, daring, fiery, and impetuous spirit, who first armed at the age of twelve years, after which time, it is said, his *spur was never cold.*

Of the other events suffice it to say that they are much the same in history as in the drama; while the Poet's selection and ordering of them yield no special cause for remark. One or two points, however, it may be well to notice as throwing some light on certain allusions in the play.

In the Spring of 1405, Prince Henry, then in his nineteenth year, was at the head of an army in Wales, where Glendower had hitherto carried all before him. By his activity, prudence, and perseverance, the young hero gradually broke the Welshman down, and at length reduced the whole country into subjection. He continued in this service most of the time for four years; his valour and conduct awakening the most favourable expectations, which however were not a little dashed by his rampant hilarity during the intervals of labour in the field. His father was much grieved at these irregularities; and his grief was heightened by some loose and unfilial words that were reported to him as having fallen from the Prince in hours of merriment. Hearing of this, the Prince went to expostulate with his father; yet even then he enacted a strange freak of oddity, arraying himself in a gown of blue satin wrought full of eyelet-holes, and at each eyelet the needle still hanging by the silk; probably meaning to intimate thereby, that if his behaviour, his moral garb, were full of rents, it was not too late to sew them up, and the means were at hand for doing so. Being admitted to an interview, he fell on his knees and, presenting a dagger, begged the King to take his life, since he had withdrawn his favour. His father, much moved, threw away the dagger, and, kissing him, owned with tears that he had indeed held him in suspicion, though, as he now saw, without just cause; and promised

that no misreports should thenceforth shake his confidence in him.

At another time, one of his unruly companions being convicted of felony, and sentenced to prison by the Chief Justice, the Prince undertook to rescue him, and even went so far as to assault the Judge; who forthwith ordered him to prison also, and he had the good sense to submit. Upon being told this incident, the King exclaimed, "Happy the King that has a judge so firm in his duty, and a son so obedient to the law!"

Perhaps I should add, that the battle of Homildon was fought September 14, 1402; which marks the beginning of the play. The battle of Shrewsbury, which closes the First Part, took place July 21, 1403; Prince Henry being then only sixteen years old. The King died March 19, 1413; so that the two plays cover a period of about ten years and a half.

HISTORICAL CHARACTERS.

If these two plays are substantially one, it is the character of Prince Henry that makes them so; that is, they have their unity in him; and the common argument of them lies in the change alleged to have taken place in him on coming to the throne. Why was Henry of Monmouth so loose and wild a reveller in his youth, and yet such a proficient in noble and virtuous discipline in his manhood? what causes, internal and external, determined him to the one; what impulses from within, what influences from without, transformed him into the other? Viewed in the light of this principle, the entire work, with its broad, rich variety of incident and character, and its alternations of wit and poetry, will be seen, I think, to proceed in a spirit of wise insight and design.

Accordingly, in the first scene of the play, this matter is put forth as uppermost in the King's thoughts. I refer to what passes between him and Westmoreland touching the

victory at Homildon; where the Earl declares "it is a conquest for a prince to boast of," and the King replies, —

> "Yea, there thou mak'st me sad, and mak'st me sin,
> In envy that my Lord Northumberland
> Should be the father to so blest a son;
> Whilst I, by looking on the praise of him,
> See riot and dishonour stain the brow
> Of my young Harry. O, that it could be prov'd
> That some night-tripping fairy had exchang'd
> In cradle-clothes our children where they lay,
> And call'd mine Percy, his Plantagenet!
> Then would I have his Harry, and he mine."

One reason of Prince Henry's early irregularities seems to have grown from the character of his father. All accounts agree in representing Bolingbroke as a man of great reach and sagacity; a politician of inscrutable craft, full of insinuation, brave in the field, skilful alike at penetrating others' designs and at concealing his own; unscrupulous alike in smiling men into his service and in crunching them up after he had used them. All which is fully borne out in that, though his reign was little else than a series of rebellions and commotions proceeding in part from the injustice whereby he reached the crown and the bad title whereby he held it, yet he always got the better of them, and even turned them to his advantage. Where he could not win the heart, cutting off the head, and ever plucking fresh security out of the dangers that beset him; his last years, however, were much embittered, and his death probably hastened, by the anxieties growing out of his position, and the remorses consequent upon his crimes.

But, while such is the character generally ascribed to him, no historian has come near Shakespeare in the painting of it. Much of his best transpiration is given in the preceding play of *Richard the Second*, where he is the controlling spirit. For, though Richard is the more prominent character in that play, this is not as the mover of things, but as the receiver of movements caused by another; the effects lighting on him, while the worker of them is comparatively

unseen. For one of Bolingbroke's main peculiarities is, that he looks solely to results; and, like a true artist, the better to secure these he keeps his designs and processes in the dark; his power thus operating so secretly, that in whatever he does the thing seems to have done itself to his hand. How intense his enthusiasm, yet how perfect his coolness and composure! Then too how pregnant and forcible, always, yet how calm and gentle, and at times how terrible, his speech! how easily and unconcernedly the words drop from him, yet how pat and home they are to the persons for whom and the occasions whereon they are spoken! To all which add a flaming thirst of power, a most aspiring and mounting ambition, with an equal mixture of humility, boldness, and craft, and the result explains much of the fortune that attends him through all the plays in which he figures. For the Poet keeps him the same man throughout.

So that, taking the whole delineation together, we have at full length and done to the life, the portrait of a man in act prompt, bold, decisive, in thought sly, subtle, far-reaching; a character hard and cold indeed to the feelings, but written all over with success; which has no impulsive gushes or starts, but all is study, forecast, and calm suiting of means to preappointed ends. And this perfect self-command is in great part the secret of his strange power over others, making them almost as pliant to his purposes as are the cords and muscles of his own body; so that, as the event proves, he grows great by their feeding, till he can compass food enough without their help, and, if they go to hindering him, can eat them up. For so it turned out with the Percys; strong sinews indeed with him for a head; while, against him, their very strength served but to work their own overthrow.

Some points of this description are well illustrated in what Hotspur says of him just before the battle of Shrewsbury, in the speech beginning, —

> "The King is kind; and well we know the King
> Knows at what time to promise, when to pay."

Hotspur, to be sure, exaggerates a good deal there, as he does everywhere, still his charges have a considerable basis of truth. As further matter to the point, observe the account which the King gives of himself when remonstrating with the Prince against his idle courses; which is not less admirable for truth of history than for skill of pencil. Equally fine, also, is the account of his predecessor immediately following that of himself; where we see that he has the same sharp insight of men as of means, and has made Richard's follies and vices his tutors; from his miscarriages learning how to supplant him, and perhaps encouraging his errors, that he might make a ladder of them, to mount up and overtop him. The whole scene indeed is pregnantly characteristic both of the King and the Prince. And how the King's penetrating and remorseless sagacity is flashed forth in Hotspur's outbursts of rage at his demanding all the prisoners taken at Homildon! wherein that roll of living fire is indeed snappish enough, but then he snaps out much truth.

But, though policy was the leading trait in this able man, nevertheless it was not so prominent but that other and better traits were strongly visible. And even in his policy there was much of the breadth and largeness which distinguish the statesman from the politician. Besides, he was a man of prodigious spirit and courage, had a real eye to the interests of his country as well as of his family, and in his wars he was humane much beyond the custom of his time. And in the last scene of the Poet's delineation of him, where he says to the Prince, —

> "Come hither, Harry; sit thou by my bed,
> And hear, I think, the very latest counsel
> That ever I shall breathe";

though we have indeed his subtle policy working out like a ruling passion strong in death, still its workings are suffused with gushes of right feeling, enough to show that he was not all politician; that beneath his close-knit prudence there was a soul of moral sense, a kernel of religion. Nor

must I omit how the Poet, following the leadings both of nature and history, makes him to be plagued by foes springing up in his own bosom in proportion as he ceases to be worried by external enemies; the crown beginning to scald his brows as soon as he has crushed those who would pluck it from him.

How different is the atmosphere which waits upon the group of rebel war-chiefs, whereof Hotspur is the soul, and where chivalry reigns as supremely as wit and humour do in the haunts of Falstaff! It is difficult to speak of Hotspur satisfactorily; not indeed but that the lines of his character are bold and emphatic enough, but rather because they are so much so. For his frame is greatly disproportioned, which causes him to seem larger than he is; and one of his excesses manifests itself in a wiry, red-hot speech, which burns such an impression of him into the mind as to make any commentary seem prosaic and dull. There is no mistaking him: no character in Shakespeare stands more apart in plenitude of peculiarity; and stupidity itself cannot so disfeature him with criticism, but that he will be recognized by any one who has ever been with him. He is as much a monarch in his sphere as the King and Falstaff are in theirs; only they rule more by power, he by stress: there is something in them that takes away the will and spirit of resistance; he makes every thing bend to his arrogant, domineering, capricious temper. Who that has been with him in the scenes at the Palace and at Bangor can ever forget his bounding, sarcastic, overbearing spirit? How he hits all about, and makes the feathers fly wherever he hits! It seems as if his tongue could go through the world, and strew the road behind it with splinters. And how steeped his speech everywhere is in the poetry of the sword! In what compact and sinewy platoons and squadrons the words march out of his mouth in bristling rank and file! as if from his birth he had been cradled on the iron breast of war. How doubly-charged he is, in short,

with the electricity of chivalry! insomuch that you can touch him nowhere but he gives you a shock.

In those two scenes, what with Hotspur, and what with Glendower, the poetry is as unrivalled in its kind as the wit and humour in the best scenes at Eastcheap. What a dressing Hotspur gives the silken courtier who came to demand the prisoners! Still better, however, is the dialogue that presently follows in the same scene; where Hotspur seems to be under a spell, a fascination of rage and scorn: nothing can check him, he cannot check himself; because, besides the boundings of a most turbulent and impetuous nature, he has always had his own way, having from his boyhood held the post of a feudal war-chief. Irascible, headstrong, impatient, every effort to arrest or divert him only produces a new impatience. Whatever thought strikes him, it forthwith kindles into an overmastering passion that bears down all before it. We see that he has a rough and passionate soul, great strength and elevation of mind, with little gentleness and less delicacy, and a "force of will that rises into poetry by its own chafings." While "the passion of talk" is upon him, he fairly drifts and surges before it till exhausted, and then there supervenes an equal "passion of action." "Speaking thick" is noted as one of his peculiarities; and it is not clear whether the Poet took this from some tradition respecting him, or considered it a natural result of his prodigious rush and press of thought.

Another striking trait in Hotspur, resulting perhaps, in part, from his having so much passion in his head, is the singular absence of mind so well described by Prince Henry: "I am not of Percy's mind, the Hotspur of the North; he that kills me some six or seven dozen of Scots at a breakfast, washes his hands, and says to his wife, *Fie upon this quiet life! I want work. O, my sweet Harry!* says she, *how many hast thou killed to-day? Give my roan horse a drench*, says he; and answers, an hour after, *Some fourteen; a trifle, a trifle!*" So again in the scene

of Hotspur and his wife at Warkworth. She winds up her strain of tender womanly remonstrance by saying, —

> "Some heavy business hath my lord in hand,
> And I must know it, else he loves me not."

Before answering her, he calls in a servant, makes several inquiries about his horse, and orders him to be brought into the park, hears her reproof, and exchanges divers questions with her; then replies, "Love! I love thee not; I care not for thee, Kate"; and presently heals up the wound:

> "Come, wilt thou see me ride?
> And when I am o' horseback I will swear
> I love thee infinitely."

Here it is plain that his absence grows from a certain skittishness of mind: he has not the control of his thinking; the issues of his brain being so conceived in fire as to preclude steadiness of attention and the pauses of thought.

The qualities I have noted in Hotspur unfit him, in a great measure, for a military leader in regular warfare, his nature being too impulsive and heady for the counterpoise of so weighty an undertaking. Too impatient and eager for the contest to concert operations; abundantly able to fight battles, but not to scheme them; he is qualified to succeed only in the hurly-burly of border warfare, where success comes more by fury of onset than by wisdom of plan. All which is finely apparent just before the battle of Shrewsbury, where, if not perversely wrong-headed, he is so headstrong, peremptory, and confident even to rashness, as to be quite impracticable. We see, and his fellow-chieftains see, that there is no coming to a temper with him; he being sure to run a quarrel with any one who stands out against his proposals. Yet he is never more truly the noble Hotspur than on this occasion, when, amidst the falling-off of friends, the backwardness of allies, and the thickening of dangers, his ardent and brave spirit turns his very disadvantages into grounds of confidence.

His untamed boisterousness of tongue has one of its best

eruptions in the dispute with Glendower at Bangor, where his wit and his impudence come in for about equal shares of our admiration. He finally stops the mouth of his antagonist, or heads him off upon another subject, as he does again shortly after, in a dispute about the partitioning of the realm; and he does it not so much by force of reason as of will and speech. His contempt of poetry is highly characteristic; though it is observable that he has spoken more poetry than any one else in the play. But poetry is altogether an impulse with him, not a purpose, as it is with Glendower; and he loses all thought of himself and his speech, in the intensity of passion with which he contemplates the object or occasion that moves him. His celebrated description of the fight between Glendower and Mortimer has been censured as offending good taste by its extravagance. It would not be in good taste indeed to put such a strain into the mouth of a contemplative sage, like Prospero; but in Hotspur its very extravagance is in good taste, because hugely characteristic.

Hotspur is a general favourite: whether from something in himself or from the King's treatment of him, he has our good-will from the start; nor is it without some reluctance that we set the Prince above him in our regard. Which may be owing in part to the interest we take, and justly, in his wife; who, timid, solicitous, affectionate, and playful, is a woman of the true Shakespearian stamp. How delectable is the harmony felt between her prying, inquisitive gentleness and his rough, stormy courage! for in her gentleness there is much strength, and his bravery is not without gentleness. The scene at Warkworth, where they first appear together, is a choice heart-refection: combining the beauty of movement and of repose, it comes into the surrounding elements like a patch of sunshine in a tempest.

The best of historical matter for poetical and dramatic uses has seldom been turned to better account that way than in the portrait of Glendower. He is represented, with

great art and equal truth, according to the superstitious belief of his time; a belief in which himself doubtless shared: for, if the winds and tempests came *when* he wished them, it was natural for him to think, as others thought, that they came *because* he wished them. The popular ideas respecting him all belonged to the region of poetry; and Shakespeare has given them with remarkable exactness, at the same time penetrating and filling them with his own spirit.

Crediting the alleged portents of his nativity, Glendower might well conclude he was "not in the roll of common men"; and so betake himself to the study and practice of those magic arts which were generally believed in then, and for which he was specially marked by his birth and all the courses of his life. And for the same cause he would naturally become somewhat egotistical, long-winded, and tedious; presuming that what was interesting to him as relating to himself would be equally so to others for its own sake. So that we need not altogether discredit Hotspur's account of the time spent by him "in reckoning up the several devils' names that were his lacqueys." For, though Hotspur exaggerates here, as usual, yet we see that he has some excuse for his sauciness to Glendower, in that he has been dreadfully bored by him. And there is something ludicrous withal in the Welshman's being so wrapped up in himself as not to perceive the unfitness of talking thus to one so hare-brained and skittish.

Glendower, however, is no ordinary enthusiast. A man of wild and mysterious imaginations, yet he has a practical skill that makes them tell against the King; his dealing in magic rendering him even more an object of fear than his valour and conduct. And his behaviour in the disputes with Hotspur approves him as much superior in the external qualities of a gentleman as he is more superstitious. Though no suspicion of any thing false or mean can attach to Hotspur, it is characteristic of him to indulge his haughty temper even to the thwarting of his purpose: he will haz-

ard the blowing-up of the conspiracy rather than put a bridle on his impatience; which the Welshman, with all his grandeur and earnestness of pretension, is too prudent to do.

In the portrait of Glendower there is nothing unwarranted by history; only Shakespeare has with marked propriety made the enthusiastic and poetical spirit of the man send him to the study of magic arts, as involving some natural aptitude or affinity for them. It may be interesting to know that he managed to spin out the contest among the wilds of Snowdon far into the next reign; his very superstition perhaps lending him a strength of soul which no misfortune could break. I must not leave this strange being without remarking how sweetly his mind nestles in the bosom of poetry; as appears in the passage where he acts as interpreter between his daughter and her husband Mortimer.

Among the minor historical characters of these plays there is much judicious discrimination. — Lord Bardolph is shrewd and sensible, of a firm practical understanding, and prudent forecast; and none the less brave, that his cool judgment puts him upon looking carefully before he leaps. — Vernon, with his well-poised discretion in war-council and his ungrudging admiration of the Prince, makes a happy foil to Hotspur, whose intemperate daring in conduct, and whose uneasiness at hearing Prince Henry's praises spoken, would something detract from his manhood, but that no suspicion of dishonour can fasten upon him. — The Archbishop, so forthright and strong-thoughted, bold, enterpris ing, and resolute in action, in speech grave, moral, and sententious, forms, all together, a noble portrait. — The Chief Justice, besides the noble figure he makes at the close, is, with capital dramatic effect, brought forward several times in passages at arms with Falstaff; where his good-natured wisdom, as discovered in his suppressed enjoyment of the fat old sinner's wit, just serves to sweeten without at all diluting the reverence that waits upon his office and char

acter. — Northumberland makes good his character as found in history. Evermore talking big and doing nothing; full of verbal tempest and practical impotence; and still ruining his friends, and at last himself, between "I would" and "I dare not"; he lives without our respect, and dies unpitied of us; while his daughter-in-law's remembrance of her noble husband kindles a sharp resentment of his mean-spirited backwardness, and a hearty scorn of his blustering verbiage.

Prince Henry was evidently a great favourite with the Poet. And he makes him equally so with his readers: pouring the full wealth of his genius upon him; centering in him almost every manly grace and virtue, and presenting him as the mirror of Christian princes and loadstar of honour; a model at once of a hero, a gentleman, and a sage. Wherein, if not true to fact, he was true to the sentiment of the English people; who probably cherished the memory of Henry the Fifth with more fondness than any other of their kings since the great Alfred.

In the character of this man Shakespeare deviated from all the historical authorities known to have been accessible to him. Later researches, however, have justified his course herein, and thus given rise to the notion of his having drawn from some traditionary matter that had not yet found a place in written history. An extraordinary conversion was generally thought to have fallen upon the Prince on coming to the crown; insomuch that the old chroniclers could only account for the change by some miracle of grace or touch of supernatural benediction. Walsingham, a contemporary of the Prince, tells us that "as soon as he was invested with the ensigns of royalty he was suddenly changed into a new man, behaving with propriety, modesty, and gravity, and showing a desire to practise every kind of virtue." Caxton, also, says "he was a noble prince after he was king and crowned; howbeit in his youth he had been wild, reckless, and spared nothing of his lusts

nor desires." And various other old writers speak of him in the same strain.

Prince Henry's conduct was indeed such as to lose him his seat in the Council, where he was replaced by his younger brother. Nevertheless it is certain that in mental and literary accomplishment he was in advance of his age; being in fact one of the most finished gentlemen as well as greatest statesmen and best men of his time. This seeming contradiction is all cleared up in the Poet's representation. It was for the old chroniclers to talk about his miraculous conversion: Shakespeare, in a far wiser spirit, and more religious too, brings his conduct within the ordinary rules of human character; representing whatever changes occur in him as proceeding by the methods and proportions of nature. His early "addiction to courses vain" is accounted for by the character of Falstaff; it being no impeachment of his intellectual or moral manhood, that he is drawn away by such a mighty magazine of fascinations. It is true, he is not altogether unhurt by his connection with Sir John: he is himself sensible of this; and the knowledge goes far to justify his final treatment of Falstaff. But, even in his wildest merry-makings, we still taste in him a spice and flavour of manly rectitude; undesigned by him indeed, and the more assuring to us, that he evidently does not taste it himself. Shakespeare has nothing finer in its way than the gradual sundering of the ties that bind him to Falstaff, as the higher elements of his nature are called forth by emergent occasions; and his turning the dregs of unworthy companionship into food of noble thought and sentiment, extracting the sweetness of wisdom from the weeds of dangerous experiences. And his whole progress through this transformation, till "like a reappearing star" he emerges from the cloud of wildness wherein he had obscured his contemplation, is dappled with rare spots of beauty and promise.*

* Our sympathies would be almost wholly with Hotspur and his friends, had not the Poet raised up a new interest in the chivalrous bearing of Henry of Mon-

At the battle of Shrewsbury, as already stated, the Prince was sixteen years old. But, young as he was, he did the work of a man, never ceasing to fight where the battle was hottest; though so badly hurt in the face, that much effort was used to withdraw him from the field. So that in fact he was some twenty years younger than Hotspur. Such a difference of age would naturally foreclose any rivalry between them; and one of the Poet's most judicious departures from literal truth is in approximating their ages, that such influences might have a chance to work. The King, too, displays his usual astuteness in endeavouring to make the fame of Hotspur tell upon the Prince; though he still strikes wide of his real character, misderiving his conduct from a want of noble aptitudes, whereas it springs rather from a lack of such motives and occasions with which his better aptitudes can combine. But the King knows right well there is matter in him that will take fire when such sparks are struck into it. Accordingly, before they part, the Prince speaks such words, and in such a spirit, as to win his father's confidence; the emulation

mouth, to balance the noble character of the young Percy. Rash, proud, ambitious, prodigal of blood, as Hotspur is, we feel that there is not an atom of meanness in his composition. He would carry us away with him, were it not for the milder courage of young Harry, — the courage of principle and of mercy. Frank, liberal, prudent, gentle, but yet brave as Hotspur himself, the Prince shows us that, even in his wildest excesses, he has drunk deeply of the fountains of truth and wisdom. The wisdom of the King is that of a cold and subtle politician; Hotspur seems to stand out from his followers as a haughty feudal lord, too proud to have listened to any teacher but his own will; but the Prince, in casting away the dignity of his station to commune freely with his fellow-men, has attained that strength which is above all conventional power: his virtues as well as his frailties belong to our common humanity; the virtues capable, therefore, of the highest elevation; the frailties not pampered into crimes by the artificial incentives of social position. His challenge to Hotspur exhibits all the attributes of the gentleman as well as the hero, — mercy, sincerity, modesty, courage. Could the Prince have reached this height amidst the cold formalities of his father's Court? We think that Shakespeare meant distinctly to show that Henry of Monmouth, when he "sounded the very base-string of humility," gathered out of his dangerous experience that spirit of sympathy with human actions and motives from which a sovereign is almost necessarily excluded. — KNIGHT.

kindled in him being no less noble than the object of it. Now it is that his many-sided, harmonious manhood begins fully to unfold itself. He has already discovered forces answering to all the attractions of Falstaff; and it is to be hoped that none will think the worse of him for preferring the climate of Eastcheap to that of the Court. But the issue proves that he has far better forces, which sleep indeed during the absence, but spring forth at the coming, of their proper stimulants and opportunities. In the close-thronging dangers that beset his father's throne he has noble work to do; in the thick-clustering honours of Hotspur, noble motives for doing it; and the two together furnish those more congenial attractions whereby he is gradually detached from a life of hunt-sport, and drawn up into the nobly-proportioned beauty with which both poetry and history have invested him.

In this delineation are many passages over which the lover of poetry and manhood delights to linger; but it would be something out of keeping with my method to quote any of them. Nor can I dwell on the many gentle and heroic qualities that make up Prince Henry's well-rounded beautiful character. His tenderness of filial piety appears in his heart-bleeding grief at his father's sickness; and his virtuous prudence no less appears in his avoiding all show of grief, as knowing that this, taken together with his past levity, will be sure to draw on him the imputation of hypocrisy: his magnanimity appears in his pleading for the life of Douglas; his ingenuousness, in the free and graceful apology to the King for his faults; his good-nature and kindness of heart, in the apostrophe to Falstaff when he thinks him dead; his chivalrous generosity, in the enthusiasm with which he praises Hotspur; and his modesty, in the style of his challenge to him. And yet his nobilities of heart and soul come along in such easy, natural touches, they drop out so much as the spontaneous issues of his life, that we hardly notice them, thus engaging him our love and honour, we scarce know how or why. Great without

effort, and good without thinking of it, he is indeed a noble ornament of the princely character.

COMIC CHARACTERS.

I have already observed how Prince Henry's deportment as King was in marked contrast with his course while Prince of Wales. I have also noted that the change in him on coming to the throne was so great and so sudden as to be popularly ascribed to a miracle of grace. Now Shakespeare knew that the day of miracles was passed. He also knew that without a miracle such a sudden revolution of *character* could not be. And so his idea clearly was, that the change was not really *in* his character, but only superinduced *upon* it by change of position; that his excellent qualities were but disguised from the world by clouds of loose behaviour, which, when the time came, he threw off, and appeared as he really was. To translate the reason and process of this change into dramatic form and expression was the problem which the Poet undertook to solve in these two plays.

In his delineation of the Prince Shakespeare followed the historians as far as they gave him any solid ground to go upon; where they failed him, he supplied the matter from his own stores. Now in all reason Prince Hal must have had companions in the merry-makings which are related of him; for no man of sense goes into such pastimes alone. But of the particular persons "unletter'd, rude, and shallow," with whom he had "his hours fill'd up with riots, banquets, sports," nothing was known, not even their names. So that the Poet had no way to set forth this part of the man's life but by creating one or more *representative characters*, concentrating in them such a fund of mental attractions as might overcome the natural repugnance of an upright and noble mind to their vices. Which is just what the Poet does in this work. And his method was, to embody in imaginary forms that truth of which the

actual forms had not been preserved; for, as Hallam well observes, "what he invented is as truly historical, in the large sense of moral history, as what he read."

From the account already given of Bolingbroke it is plain enough what state of things would be likely to wait on him. His great force of character would needs give shape and tone to Court and Council-board, while his subtlety and intricacy might well render the place any thing but inviting to a young man of free and generous aptitudes. That the Prince, as Shakespeare conceived him, should breathe somewhat hard in such an atmosphere, is not difficult to understand. However he may respect such a father, and though in thought he may even approve the public counsels, still he reluctes to share in them, as going against his grain; and so is naturally drawn away either to such occupations where his high-strung energies can act without crossing his honourable feelings, or else to some tumultuous merry-makings where, laying off all distinct purpose, and untying his mind into perfect dishabille, he can let his bounding spirits run out in transports of frolic and fun. The question then is, to what sort of attractions will he betake himself? It must be no ordinary companionship that yields entertainment to such a spirit even in his loosest moments. Whatever bad or questionable elements may mingle in his mirth, it must have some fresh and rich ingredients, some sparkling and generous flavour, to make him relish it. Any thing like vulgar rowdyism cannot fail of disgusting him. His ears were never organized to that sort of music.

Here then we have a sort of dramatic necessity for the character of Falstaff. To answer the purpose, it was imperative that he should be just such a marvellous congregation of charms and vices as he is. None but an old man could be at once so dissolute and so discerning, or appear to think so much like a wise man even when talking most unwisely; and he must have a world of wit and sense, to reconcile a mind of such native rectitude and penetration to his profli-

gate courses. In the qualities of Sir John we can easily see how the Prince might be the madcap reveller that history gives him out, and yet be all the while laying in choice preparations of wisdom and virtue, so as to need no other conversion than the calls of duty and the opportunities of noble enterprise.

Falstaff's character is more complex than can well be digested into the forms of logical statement; which makes him a rather impracticable subject for analysis. He has so much, or *is* so much, that one cannot easily tell what he is. Diverse and even opposite qualities meet in him; yet they poise so evenly, blend so happily, and work together so smoothly, that no generalities can set him off; if we undertake to grasp him in a formal conclusion, the best part of him still escapes between the fingers; so that the only way to give an idea of him is to take the man himself along and show him; and who shall do this with "plump Jack"? One of the wittiest of men, yet he is not a wit; one of the most sensual of men, still he cannot with strict justice be called a sensualist; he has a strong sense of danger and a lively regard to his own safety, a peculiar vein indeed of cowardice, or something very like it, yet he is not a coward; he lies and brags prodigiously, still he is not a liar nor a braggart. Any such general descriptions applied to him can serve no end but to make us think we understand him when we do not.

If I were to fix upon any one thing as specially characteristic of Falstaff, I should say it is an amazing fund of good sense. His stock of this, to be sure, is pretty much all enlisted in the service of sensuality, yet nowise so but that the servant still overpeers and outshines the master. Then too his thinking has such agility, and is at the same time so pertinent, as to do the work of the most prompt and popping wit; yet in such sort as to give the impression of something much larger and stronger than wit. For mere wit, be it ever so good, requires to be sparingly used, and the more it tickles the sooner it tires; like salt, it is grateful as a sea-

soning, but will not do as food. Hence it is that great wits, unless they have great judgment too, are so apt to be great bores. But no one ever wearies of Falstaff's talk, who has the proper sense for it; his speech being like pure fresh cold water, which always tastes good because it is tasteless. The wit of other men seems to be some special faculty or mode of thought, and lies in a quick seizing of remote and fanciful affinities; in Falstaff it lies not in any one thing more than another, for which cause it cannot be defined: and I know not how to describe it but as that roundness and evenness of mind which we call good sense, so quickened and pointed indeed as to produce the effect of wit, yet without hindrance to its own proper effect. To use a snug idiomatic phrase, what Falstaff says always *fits all round.*

And Falstaff is well aware of his power in this respect. He is vastly proud of it too; yet his pride never shows itself in an offensive shape, his good sense having a certain instinctive delicacy that keeps him from every thing like that. In this proud consciousness of his resources he is always at ease; hence in part the ineffable charm of his conversation. Never at a loss, and never apprehensive that he shall be at a loss, he therefore never exerts himself, nor takes any concern for the result; so that nothing is strained or far-fetched: relying calmly on his strength, he invites the toughest trials, as knowing that his powers will bring him off without any using of the whip or the spur, and by merely giving the rein to their natural briskness and celerity. Hence it is also that he so often lets go all regard to prudence of speech, and thrusts himself into tight places and predicaments: he thus makes or seeks occasions to exercise his fertility and alertness of thought, being well assured that he shall still come off uncornered, and that the greater his seeming perplexity, the greater will be his triumph. Which explains the purpose of his incomprehensible lies: he tells them, surely, not expecting them to be believed, but partly for the pleasure he takes in

the excited play of his faculties, partly for the surprise he causes by his still more incomprehensible feats of dodging. Such is his story about the men in buckram who grew so soon from two to eleven; and how "three misbegotten knaves in Kendall green came at my back, and let drive at me; — for it was so dark, Hal, that thou couldst not see thy hand"; — lies which, as himself knows well enough, are "gross as a mountain, open, palpable." These, I take it, are studied self-exposures, to invite an attack. Else why should he thus affirm in the same breath the colour of the men's clothes and the darkness of the night? The whole thing is clearly a scheme, to provoke his hearers to come down upon him, and then witch them with his facility and felicity in extricating himself. And so, when they pounce upon him, and seem to have him in their toils, he forthwith springs a diversion upon them:

"*Prince.* What trick, what device, what starting-hole canst thou now find out, to hide thee from this open and apparent shame?

Fals. By the Lord, I knew ye as well as He that made ye. Why, hear ye, my masters: was it for me to kill the heir-apparent? Should I turn upon the true Prince? — Why, thou know'st I am as valiant as Hercules; but beware instinct: the lion will not touch the true prince. Instinct is a great matter: I was a coward on instinct. I shall think the better of myself and thee during my life; I for a valiant lion, and thou for a true prince."

To understand this aright, we must bear in mind, that according to the general rule of succession Prince Henry was not the true prince. Legally considered, his father was an usurper; and he could have no right to the crown but in virtue of some higher law. This higher law is authenticated by Falstaff's instinct. The lion, king of beasts, knows royalty by royal intuition.

Such is the catastrophe for which the foregoing acts, the hacking of his sword, the insinuations of cowardice, the boastings, and the palpable lies, were the prologue and preparation. So that his course here is all of a piece with his usual practice of involving himself in difficulties, the better to set off his readiness at shifts and evasions; know-

ing that, the more he gets entangled in his talk, the richer will be the effect when by a word he slips off the entanglement. I am persuaded that Sir John suspected all the while who their antagonists were in the Gadshill robbery; but determined to fall in with and humour the joke, on purpose to make sport for the Prince and himself, and at the same time to retort their deception by pretending ignorance.

We have similar feats of dodging in the scene where Falstaff rails at the Hostess for keeping a house where pockets are picked, and also at the Prince for saying that his ring was copper. The Prince entering just then, the Hostess tells him of the affair, Falstaff goes to railing at her again, and she defends herself; which brings on the following:

"*Prince.* Thou sayest true, Hostess; and he slanders thee most grossly.

Host. So he doth you, my lord; and said, this other day, you ought him a thousand pound.

Prince. Sirrah, do I owe you a thousand pound?

Fals. A thousand pound, Hal! a million! Thy love is worth a million; thou owest me thy love.

Host. Nay, my lord, he called you Jack, and said he would cudgel you.

Fals. Did I, Bardolph?

Bard. Indeed, Sir John, you said so.

Fals. Yea; if he said my ring was copper.

Prince. I say 'tis copper: dar'st thou be as good as thy word now?

Fals. Why, Hal, thou know'st, as thou art but man, I dare; but, as thou art prince, I fear thee as I fear the roaring of the lion's whelp.

Prince. And why not as the lion?

Fals. The King himself is to be feared as the lion. Dost thou think I'll fear thee as I fear thy father?

Prince. Sirrah, there's no room for faith, truth, nor honesty in this bosom of thine. Charge an honest woman with picking thy pocket! Why, thou impudent, emboss'd rascal, if there were any thing in thy pocket but tavern-reckonings, and one poor pennyworth of sugar-candy to make thee long-winded; — if thy pocket were enriched with any other injuries but these, I am a villain. And yet you will stand to it; you will not pocket up wrong: art thou not ashamed!

Fals. Dost thou hear Hal? Thou know'st, in the state of innocency

Adam fell: and what should poor Jack Falstaff do in the days of villainy? Thou seest I have more flesh than another man, and therefore more frailty."

In all these replies there is clearly nothing more to be said. And thus, throughout, no exigency turns up but that Sir John is ready with a word that exactly fits into and fills the place. And his tactics lie not in turning upon his pursuers and holding them at bay; but, when the time is ripe, and they seem to have caught him, he instantaneously diverts them upon another scent, or else enchants them into a pause by his nimble-footed sallies and escapes.

Elsewhere the same faculty shows itself in a quick turning of events to his own advantage; as at the battle of Shrewsbury, when, being assailed by Douglas, he falls down as if killed, and in that condition witnesses the fall of Hotspur; and then claps up a scheme for appropriating the honour of his death. The stratagem must be given in his own words:

"'Sblood! 'twas time to counterfeit, or that hot termagant Scot had paid me scot and lot too. Counterfeit! I lie; I am no counterfeit: to die, is to be a counterfeit; for he is but the counterfeit of a man who hath not the life of a man: but to counterfeit dying, when a man thereby liveth, is to be no counterfeit, but the true and perfect image of life indeed. The better part of valour is discretion; in the which better part I have saved my life. — 'Zounds! I am afraid of this gunpowder Percy, though he be dead. How, if he should counterfeit too, and rise? By my faith, I am afraid he would prove the better counterfeit. Therefore I'll make him sure; yea, and I'll swear I killed him. Why may not he rise as well as I? Nothing confutes me but eyes, and nobody sees me. Therefore, sirrah, with a new wound in your thigh, come you along with me."

He then shoulders the body and walks off. Presently he meets the Prince and his brother John, throws down the body, and we have the following:

"*Fals.* There is Percy! if your father will do me any honour, so; if not, let him kill the next Percy himself. I look to be either earl or duke, I can assure you.

Prince. Why, Percy I killed, myself, and saw thee dead.

Fals. Didst thou! — Lord, Lord, how this world is given to lying! — I grant you I was down and out of breath, and so was he; but we rose both at an instant, and fought a long hour by Shrewsbury clock. If I may be believed, so; if not, let them that should reward valour bear the sin upon their own heads. I'll take it upon my death, I gave him this wound in the thigh: if the man were alive, and would deny it, 'zounds! I would make him eat a piece of my sword."

Here his action as exactly fits into and fills the place as his words do in other cases. He carries the point, not by disputing the Prince's claim, but by making it appear that they both beat down the valiant Hotspur in succession. If the Prince left Hotspur dead, he saw Falstaff dead too. And Falstaff most adroitly clinches his scheme by giving this mistake such a turn as to accredit his own lies.

It has been said that Shakespeare displays no great force of invention; and that in the incidents of his dramas he borrows much more than he originates. It is true, he discovers no pride nor prodigality of inventiveness; he shows indeed a noble indifference on that score; cares not to get up new plots and incidents of his own where he finds them ready-made to his hand. Which is to me, as I have elsewhere remarked, good evidence that he prized novelty in such things at its true worth, and chose to spend his force on the weightier matters of his art. But he is inventive enough whenever he has occasion to be so; and in these incidents about Falstaff, as in hundreds of others, he shows a fertility and aptness of invention in due measure and keeping with his other gifts.

Falstaff finds special matter of self-exultation in that the tranquil, easy contact and grapple of his mind acts as a potent stimulus on others, provided they be capable of it, lifting them up to his own height. "Men of all sorts," says he, "take a pride to gird at me. The brain of this foolish-compounded clay, man, is not able to invent any thing that tends to laughter, more than I invent, or is invented on me; I am not only witty in myself, but the cause that wit is in other men." Here it is plain that he is himself proud of

the pride that others take in girding at him; he enjoys their wit even more than they do, because he is the begetter of it. He is the flint, to draw sparks from their steel, and himself shines by the light he causes them to emit. For, in truth, to laugh and to provoke laughter is with him the chief end of man. Which is further shown in what he says of Prince John: "Good faith, this same young, sober-blooded boy doth not love me; nor a man cannot make him laugh." He sees that the brain of this dry youth has nothing for him to get hold of or work upon; that, be he ever so witty in himself, he cannot be the cause of any wit in him; and he is vexed and chagrined that his wit fails upon him. And Dr. Johnson, speaking of Prince John's frosty-hearted virtue, well remarks that "he who cannot be softened into gayety cannot easily be melted into kindness." And, let me add, none are so hopeless as they that have no bowels. Austere boys are not apt to make large-souled men. And it was this same strait-laced youth who, in the history as in the play, afterwards broke faith with the Archbishop and other insurgent leaders near York, snapping them up with a mean and cruel act of perfidy, and, which is more, *thought the better of himself for having done so.* I suspect Prince Henry is nearer Heaven in his mirth than Prince John in his prayers!

This power of generating wit and thought in others is what, in default of entertainment for his nobler qualities, attracts the Prince; who evidently takes to Sir John chiefly for the mental excitement of his conversation. And, on the other hand, Falstaff's pride of wit is specially gratified in the fascination he has over the Prince; and he spares no pains, scruples no knavery, to work diversion for him. Witness what he says to himself when tempering Justice Shallow "between his finger and his thumb": "I will devise matter enough out of this Shallow to keep Prince Harry in continual laughter the wearing-out of six fashions. O, it is much that a lie with a slight oath, and a jest with a sad brow, will do with a fellow that never had the ache in

his shoulders. O, you shall see him laugh, till his face be like a wet cloak ill laid up."

Nor has Falstaff any difficulty in stirring up congenial motions in the Prince, insomuch that the teacher sometimes has enough to do to keep his leading. Falstaff is the same in this respect when the Prince is away; indeed his wit is never more fluent and racy than in his soliloquies. But it is not so with the Prince; as appears in his occasional playing with other characters, where he is indeed sprightly and sensible enough, but wants the nimbleness and raciness of wit which he displays in conversation with Sir John. The cause of which plainly is, that Falstaff has his wit in himself; the Prince, in virtue of Falstaff's presence. With Sir John the Prince is nearly as great as he in the same kind; without him, he has none of his greatness; though he has a greatness of his own which is far better, and which Falstaff is so far from having in himself, that he cannot even perceive it in another. Accordingly it is remarkable that Prince Henry is the only person in the play who understands Falstaff, and the only one too whom Falstaff does not understand.

One of Sir John's greatest triumphs is in his first scene with the Chief Justice; the purpose of that scene being, apparently, to justify the Prince in yielding to his fascinations, by showing that there is no gravity so firm but he can thaw it into mirth, provided it be the gravity of a fertile and genial mind. And so, here, the sternness with which this wise and upright man begins is charmed into playfulness before he gets through. He slides insensibly into the style of Sir John, till at last he falls to downright punning. He even seems to draw out the interview, that he may taste the delectable spicery of Falstaff's talk; and we fancy him laughing repeatedly in his sleeve while they are talking, and then roaring himself into stitches directly he gets out of sight. Nor, unless our inward parts be sadly out of gear, can we help loving and honouring him the more for being drawn into such an intellectual frolic by such an intellectual player.

Coleridge denies that Falstaff has, properly speaking, any humour. Coleridge is high authority indeed; nevertheless I cannot so come at Sir John but that his whole mental structure seems pervaded with a most grateful and refreshing moisture; nor can I well understand any definition of humour that would exclude him from being among the greatest of all both verbal and practical humourists. Just think of his proposing Bardolph, — an offscouring and package of dregs which he has picked up, nobody can guess wherefore, unless because his face has turned into a perpetual blush and carbuncle; — just think of his proposing such a person for security, and that too to one who knows them both! To my sense, his humour is shown alike in the offer of such an endorser and in what he says about the refusal of it. And in his most exigent moments this juice keeps playing in with rarely-exhilarating effect, as in the exploit at Gadshill and the battle of Shrewsbury. And everywhere he manifestly takes a huge pleasure in referring to his own peculiarities, and putting upon them the most grotesque and droll and whimsical constructions, no one enjoying the jests that are vented on him more than he does himself.

Falstaff's overflowing humour results in a placid good-nature towards those about him, and attaches them by the mere remembrance of pleasure in his company. The tone of feeling he inspires is well shown in what the Hostess says when he leaves her for the wars: "Well, fare thee well: I have known thee these twenty-nine years, come peascod-time; but an honester and truer-hearted man — well, fare thee well." She wants to say some good of him which she cannot quite say, it is so glaringly untrue; the only instance, by the way, of her being checked by any scruples on that score. This feeling of the Hostess is especially significant in view of what has passed between them. She cannot keep angry at him, because in his roughest speeches there is something tells her it is all a mere carousal of his wits. Even when she is most at odds with him, a soothing

word at once sweetens her thoughts; so that, instead of pushing him for the money he has borrowed, she pawns her plate, to lend him ten pounds more.

And so in regard to his other associates: he often abuses them outrageously, so far as this can be done by words, yet they are not really hurt by it, and never think of resenting it. Perhaps, indeed, they do not respect him enough to feel resentment towards him. But, in truth, the juiciness of his spirit not only keeps malice out of him, but keeps others from imputing it to him. Then too he lets off as great tempests of abuse upon himself, and means just as much by them: they are but exercises of his powers, and this, merely for the exercise itself; that is, they are play; having indeed a kind of earnestness, but it is the earnestness of sport. Hence, whether alone or in company, he not only has all his faculties about him, but takes the same pleasure in exerting them, if it may be called exertion; for they always seem to go of their own accord. It is remarkable that he soliloquizes more than any of the Poet's characters except Hamlet; thought being equally an ever-springing impulse in them both, though, to be sure, in very different forms.

Nor is Falstaff's mind tied to exercises of wit and humour. He is indeed the greatest of make-sports, but he is something more. (He must be something more, else he could not be that.) He has as much practical sagacity and penetration as the King. Except the Prince, there is no person in the play who sees so far into the characters of those about him. Witness his remarks about Justice Shallow and his men: "It is a wonderful thing to see the semblable coherence of his men's spirits and his: they, by observing of him, do bear themselves like foolish justices; he, by conversing with them, is turned into a justice-like serving-man. If I had a suit to Master Shallow, I would humour his men with the imputation of being near their master; if to his men, I would curry with Master Shallow, that no man could better command his servants." Which

is indeed a most shrewd and searching commentary on what Sir John has just seen and heard. It is impossible to hit them off more felicitously.

I must add, that with Shallow and Silence for his theme Falstaff's wit fairly grows gigantic, and this too without any abatement of its frolicsome agility. The strain of humorous exaggeration with which he pursues the theme in soliloquy is indeed almost sublime. Yet in some of his reflections thereon, as in the passage just quoted, we have a clear though brief view of the profound philosopher underlying the profligate humourist and make-sport; for he there discovers a breadth and sharpness of observation, and a depth of practical sagacity, such as might have placed him in the front rank of statesmen and sages.

I have said that Falstaff, though having a peculiar vein of something very like cowardice, is not a coward. This sounds paradoxical, but I think it just. On this point Mackenzie speaks with rare exactness. "Though," says he, "I will not go so far as to ascribe valour to Falstaff, yet his cowardice, if fairly examined, will be found to be not so much a weakness as a principle: he has the sense of danger, but not the discomposure of fear." In approval of this, it is to be observed that amid the perilous exigencies of the fight his matchless brain is never a whit palsied with fear; and no sooner has he fallen down to save his life by a counterfeit death, than all his wits are at work to convert his fall into a purchase of honour. Certainly his cowardice, if the word must still be applied to him, is not such as either to keep him out of danger or to lose him the use of his powers in it. Whether surrounded with pleasures or perils, his sagacity never in the least forsakes him; and his unabated purlings of humour when death is busy all about him, and even when others are taunting him with cowardice, seem hardly reconcilable with the character generally set upon him in this respect.

As there is no touch of poetry in Falstaff, he sees nothing in the matter of honour but the sign; and he has more

good sense than to set such a value on this as to hazard that for which alone he holds it desirable. To have his name seasoned sweet in the world's regard he does not look upon as signifying any real worth in himself, and so furnishing just ground of self-respect; but only as it may yield him the pleasures and commodities of life: whereas the very soul of honour is, that it will sooner part with life than forfeit this ground of self-respect. For honour, true honour, is indeed a kind of social conscience.

Falstaff is altogether the greatest triumph of the comic Muse that the world has to show. In this judgment I believe that all who have fairly conversed with the irresistible old sinner are agreed. In the varied and delectable wealth of his conversation, it is not easy to select such parts as are most characteristic of the man; and I have rather aimed to quote what would best illustrate my points than what is best in itself. Of a higher order and a finer texture than any thing I have produced is the scene where Falstaff personates the King, to examine the Prince upon the particulars of his life. It is too long for quotation here; and I can but refer to it as probably the choicest issue of comic preparation that genius has ever bequeathed to human enjoyment.

Upon the whole, then, I think Falstaff may be justly described as having all the intellectual qualities that enter into the composition of practical wisdom, without one of the moral. If to his powers of understanding were joined an imagination equal, it is hardly too much to say he would be as great a poet as Shakespeare. And in all this we have, it seems to me, just the right constituents of perfect fitness for the dramatic purpose and exigency which his character was meant to answer. In his solid and clear understanding, his discernment and large experience, his fulness and quickness of wit and resource, and his infinite humour, what were else dark in the life of Prince Henry is made plain; and we can hardly fail to see how he is drawn to what is in itself bad indeed, yet drawn in virtue of something within him

that still prefers him in our esteem. With less of wit, sense, and spirit, Sir John could have got no hold on the Prince; and if to these attractive qualities he had not joined others of a very odious and repulsive kind, he would have held him too fast.

I suppose it is no paradox to say that, hugely as we delight to be with Falstaff, he is notwithstanding just about the last man that any one would wish to resemble; which fact, as I take it, is enough of itself to keep the pleasure of his part free from any moral infection or taint. And our repugnance to being like him is not so much because he offends the moral feelings as because he hardly touches them at all, one way or the other. The character seems to lie mainly out of their sphere; and they agree to be silent towards him, as having practically disrobed himself of moral attributes. Now, however bad we may be, these are probably the last elements of our being that we would consent to part with. Nor, perhaps, is there any thing that our nature so vitally shrinks away from, as to have men's moral feelings sleep concerning us. To be treated as beneath blame, is the greatest indignity that can be offered us. Who would not rather be hated by men than be such as they should not respect enough to hate?

This aloofness of the moral feelings seems owing in great part to the fact of the character impressing us, throughout, as that of a player; though such a player whose good sense keeps every thing stagy and theatrical out of his playing. He lives but to furnish, for himself and others, intellectual wine, and his art lies in turning every thing about him into this. His immoralities are mostly such wherein the ludicrous element is prominent; and in the entertainment of this their other qualities are lost sight of. The animal susceptibilities of our nature are in him carried up to their highest pitch; his several appetites hug their respective objects with exquisite gust; his vast plumpness is all mellow with physical delight and satisfaction; and he converts it all into thought and mirth. Moreover his speech borrows

additional flavour and effect from the thick foldings of flesh which it oozes through; therefore he glories in his much flesh, and cherishes it as being the procreant cradle of jests: if his body is fat, it enables his tongue to drop fatness; and in the chambers of his brain all the pleasurable agitations that pervade the structure below are curiously wrought into mental delectation. With how keen and inexhaustible a relish does he pour down sack, as if he tasted it all over and through his body, to the ends of his fingers and toes! yet who does not see that he has more pleasure in discoursing about it than in drinking it? And so it is through all the particulars of his enormous sensuality. And he makes the same use of his vices and infirmities; nay, he often caricatures those he has, and sometimes affects those he has not, that he may get the same profit out of them.

Thus Falstaff strikes us, throughout, as acting a part; insomuch that our conscience of right and wrong has little more to do with the man himself than with a good representation of him on the stage. And his art, if not original and innate, has become second nature: if the actor was not born with him, it has grown to him, and become a part of him, so that he cannot lay it off; and if he has nobody else to entertain, he must still keep playing for the entertainment of himself. But because we do not think of applying moral tests to him, therefore, however we may surrender to his fascinations, we never feel any respect for him. And it is very considerable that he has no self-respect. The reason of which is close at hand: for respect is a sentiment of which mere players, as such, are not legitimate objects. Not but that actors may be very worthy, upright men: there have been many capital gentlemen among them: as such, they are indeed abundantly respectable: but in the useful callings men are respected for their calling's sake, even though their characters be not deserving of respect; which seems not to be the case with men of the stage. And as Falstaff is no less a player to himself than to others, he therefore respects himself as little as others respect him.

It must not be supposed, however, that because he touches the moral feelings so little one way or the other, therefore his company and conversation were altogether harmless to those who actually shared them. It is not, cannot be so; nor has the Poet so represented it. "Evil communications corrupt good manners," whether known and felt to be evil or not. And so the ripe understanding of Falstaff himself teaches us: "It is certain that either wise bearing or ignorant carriage is caught, as men take diseases one of another; therefore let men take heed of their company." In the intercourse of men there are always certain secret, mysterious influences at work: the conversation of others affects us without our knowing it, and by methods past our finding out; and it is always a sacrament of harm to be in the society of those whom we do not respect.

In all that happens to Falstaff, the being cast off at last by the Prince is the only thing that really hurts his feelings. And as this is the only thing that hurts him, so it is the only one that does him any good: for he is strangely inaccessible to inward suffering; and yet nothing but this can make him better. His character keeps on developing, and growing rather worse, to the end of the play; and there are some positive indications of a hard bad heart in him. His abuse of Shallow's hospitality is exceedingly detestable, and argues that hardening of all within which tells far more against a man than almost any amount of mere sensuality. For it is a great mistake to suppose that our sensual vices, though they may and often do work the most harm to ourselves, are morally the worst. The malignant vices, those that cause us to take pleasure in the pain or damage of others, — it is in these that Hell is most especially concentrated. Satan is neither a glutton nor a wine-bibber; he himself stoops not to the lusts of the flesh, though he delights to see his poor dupes eaten up by them: but to gloat over or to feast on the agonies that one inflicts, this is truly Satanic. In the matter about Justice Shallow we are let into those worse traits of Falstaff, such as his unscrupulous and un-

relenting selfishness, which had else escaped our dull perceptions, but which, through all the disguises of art, have betrayed themselves to the apprehensive discernment of Prince Henry. Thus we here come upon the delicate thread which connects that sapient Justice with what I have stated to be the main purpose of the drama. The bad usage which Falstaff puts upon Shallow has the effect of justifying to us the usage which he at last receives from the Prince. And something of the kind was needful in order to bring the Prince's character off from such an act altogether bright and sweet in our regard. For, after sharing so long in the man's prodigality of mental exhilaration, to shut down upon him so, was pretty hard.

I must not leave Sir John without remarking how he is a sort of public brain from which shoot forth nerves of communication through all the limbs and members of the commonwealth. The most broadly-representative, perhaps, of all ideal characters, his conversations are as diversified as his capabilities; so that through him the vision is let forth into a long-drawn yet clear perspective of old English life and manners. What a circle of vices and obscurities and nobilities are sucked into his train! how various in size and quality the orbs that revolve around him and shine by his light! from the immediate heir of England and the righteous Lord Chief Justice to poor Robin Ostler who died of one idea, having "never joy'd since the price of oats rose." He is indeed a multitudinous man; and can spin fun enough out of his marvellous brain to make all the world "laugh and grow fat."

We have had several glimpses of Mrs. Quickly, the Hostess of Eastcheap. She is well worth a steady looking at. One of the most characteristic passages in the play is her account of Falstaff's engagement to her; which has been aptly commented on by Coleridge as showing how her mind runs altogether in the rut of actual events. She can think of things only in the precise order of their occur-

rence, having no power to select such as touch her purpose, and to detach them from the circumstantial irrelevancies with which they are consorted in her memory.

In keeping with this mental peculiarity, her character savours strongly of her whereabout in life; she is plentifully trimmed with vices and vulgarities, and these all taste rankly of her place and calling, thus showing that she has as much of moral as of mental passiveness. Notwithstanding, she always has an odour of womanhood about her, even her worst features being such as none but a woman could have. Nor is her character, with all its ludicrous and censurable qualities, unrelieved, as we have seen, by traits of generosity that relish equally of her sex. It is even doubtful whether she would have entertained Sir John's proposals of marriage so favourably, but that at the time of making them he was in a condition to need her kindness. Her woman's heart could not stint itself from the plump old sinner when he had wounds to be dressed and pains to be soothed. And who but a woman could speak such words of fluttering eagerness as she speaks in urging on his arrest: "Do your offices, do your offices, Master Fang and Master Snare; do me, do me, do me your offices"; where her heart seems palpitating with an anxious hope that her present action may make another occasion for her kind ministrations? Sometimes, indeed, she gets wrought up to a pretty high pitch of temper, but she cannot hold herself there; and between her turns of anger and her returns to sweetness there is room for more of womanly feeling than I shall venture to describe. And there is still more of the woman in the cunning simplicity — or is it simpleness? — with which she manages to keep her good opinion of Sir John; as when, on being told that at his death "he cried out of women, and said they were devils incarnal," she replies, "'A never could abide carnation; 't was a colour he never liked"; as if she could find no sense in his words but what would stand smooth with her interest and her affection.

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It is curious to observe how Mrs. Quickly dwells on the confines of virtue and shame, and sometimes plays over the borders, ever clinging to the reputation, and perhaps to the consciousness, of the one, without foreclosing the invitations of the other. For it is very evident that even in her worst doings she hides from herself their ill-favour under a fair name; as people often paint the cheeks of their vices, and then look them sweetly in the face, though they cannot but know the paint is all that keeps them from being unsightly and loathsome. In her case, however, this may spring, in part, from a simplicity not unlike that which sometimes causes little children to shut their eyes at what affrights them, and then think themselves safe. And yet she shows considerable knowledge of the world; is not without shrewdness in her way; but, in truth, the world her soul lives in, and grows intelligent of, is itself a discipline of moral obtuseness; and this is one reason why she loves it. On the whole, therefore, Mrs. Quickly must be set down as a naughty woman; the Poet clearly meant her so; and, in mixing so much of good with the general preponderance of bad in her composition, he has shown a rare spirit of wisdom, such as may well remind us that "both good men and bad men are apt to be less so than they seem."

Such is one formation of life to which the Poet conducts us by a pathway leading from Sir John. But we have an avenue opening out from him into a much richer formation. Aside from the humour of the characters themselves, there is great humour of art in the bringing-together of Falstaff and Shallow. Whose risibilities are not quietly shaken up to the centre, as he studies the contrast between them, and the sources of their interest in each other? Shallow is vastly proud of his acquaintance with Sir John, and runs over with consequentiality as he reflects upon it. Sir John understands this perfectly, and is drawn to him quite as much for the pleasure of making a butt of him as in the hope of currying a road to his purse.

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One of the most potent spots in Justice Shallow is the exulting self-complacency with which he remembers his youthful essays in profligacy; wherein, though without suspecting it, he was the sport and byword of his companions; he having shown in them the same boobyish alacrity as he now shows in prating about them. His reminiscences in this line are superlatively diverting, partly, perhaps, as reminding us of a perpetual sort of people, not unfrequently met with in the intercourse of life.

Another choice spot in Shallow is a huge love or habit of talking on when he has nothing to say; as though his tongue were hugging and kissing his words. Thus, when Sir John asks to be excused from staying with him over night: "I will not excuse you; you shall not be excused; excuses shall not be admitted; there is no excuse shall serve; you shall not be excused." And he lingers upon his words and keeps rolling them over in his mouth with a still keener relish in the garden after supper. This fond caressing of his phrases springs not merely from sterility of thought, but partly also from that vivid self-appreciation which causes him to dwell with such rapture on the spirited sallies of his youth.

One more point about fetches the compass of his genius, he being considerable mainly for his loquacious thinness. It is well instanced in his appreciation of Sir John's witticism on Mouldy, one of the recruits he is taking up:

"*Fals.* Is thy name Mouldy?

Moul. Yea, an 't please you.

Fals. 'Tis the more time thou wert used.

Shal. Ha, ha, ha! most excellent, i' faith! things that are mouldy lack use: very singular good! In faith, well said, Sir John; very well said."

The mixture of conceit and sycophancy here is charming. Of course it is not so much the wit as his own perception of the wit, that the critic admires.

One would suppose the force of feebleness had done its best in Shallow, yet it is made to do several degrees better

in his cousin, Justice Silence. The tautology of the one has its counterpart in the taciturnity of the other. And Shallow's habit in this may have grown, in part, from talking to his cousin, and getting no replies; for Silence has scarce life enough to answer, unless it be to echo the question. The only faculty he seems to have is memory, and he has not force enough of his own to set even this in motion; nothing but excess of wine can make it stir. So that his taciturnity is but the proper outside of his essential vacuity, and springs from sheer dearth of soul. He is indeed a stupendous platitude of a man! The character is poetical by a sort of inversion; as extreme ugliness sometimes has the effect of beauty, and fascinates the eye.

Shakespeare evinces a peculiar delight sometimes in weaving poetical conceptions round the leanest subjects; and we have no finer instance of this than where Silence, his native sterility of brain being overcome by the working of sack on his memory, keeps pouring forth snatches from old ballads. How delicately comical the volubility with which he trundles off the fag-ends of popular ditties, when in "the sweet of the night" his heart has grown rich with the exhilaration of wine! Who can ever forget the exquisite humour of the contrast between Silence dry and Silence drunk?

In this vocal flow of Silence we catch the right spirit and style of old English mirth. For he must have passed his life in an atmosphere of song, since it was only by dint of long custom and endless repetition that so passive a memory as his could have got stored with such matter. And the snatches he sings are fragments of old minstrelsy "that had long been heard in the squire's hall and the yeoman's chimney-corner," where friends and neighbours were wont to "sing aloud old songs, the precious music of the heart."

These two sapient Justices are admirably fitted to each other, for indeed they have worn together. Shallow highly appreciates his kinsman, who in turn looks up to him as his great man, and as a kind of superior nature. It were

hardly fair to quit them without referring to their piece of dialogue about old Double; where in all the ludicrous oddity of the thing we have touches that "feelingly persuade us what we are." And I suppose there is none so poor shell of humanity but that, if we apply our ear, and listen intently, "from within are heard murmurings whereby the monitor expresses mysterious union with its native sea." It is considerable that this bit of dialogue occurs at our first meeting with the speakers; as if on purpose to set and gauge our feelings aright towards them; to forestall and prevent an overmuch rising of contempt for them; which is probably about the worst feeling we can cherish.

The drama of *King Henry the Fourth*, taking the two Parts as artistically one, is deservedly ranked among the very highest of Shakespeare's achievements. The characterization, whether for quantity or quality or variety, or again whether regarded in the individual development or the dramatic combination, is above all praise. And yet, large and free as is the scope here given to invention, the parts are all strictly subordinated to the idea of the whole as an historical drama; insomuch that even Falstaff, richly ideal as is the character, everywhere helps on the history; a whole century of old English wit and sense and humour being crowded together and compacted in him. And one is surprised withal, upon reflection, to see how many scraps and odd minutes of intelligence are here to be met with. The Poet seems indeed to have been almost everywhere, and brought away some tincture and relish of the place; as though his body were set full of eyes, and every eye took in matter of thought and memory: here we have the smell of eggs and butter; there we turn up a fragment of old John of Gaunt; elsewhere we chance upon a pot of Tewksbury mustard; again we hit a bit of popular superstition, how Earl Douglas "runs o' horseback up a hill perpendicular": on the march with Falstaff, we contemplate "the cankers of a calm world and a long peace"; at Clement's-

Inn we hear "the chimes at midnight"; at Master Shallow's we "eat a last year's pippin of my own grafting, with a dish of caraways and so forth": now we are amidst the poetries of chivalry and the felicities of victory; now amidst the obscure sufferings of war, where its inexorable iron hand enters the widow's cottage, and snatches away the land's humblest comforts. And so I might go on indefinitely, the particulars in this kind being so numerous as might well distract the mind, yet so skilfully composed that the number seems not large, till by a special effort of thought one goes to viewing them severally. And these particulars, though so unnoticed or so little noticed in the detail, are nevertheless so ordered that they all tell in the result. How strong is the principle of organic unity and life pervading the whole, may be specially instanced in Falstaff; whose sayings everywhere so fit and cleave to the circumstances, to all the oddities of connection and situation out of which they grow; have such a mixed smacking, such a various and composite relish, made up from all the peculiarities of the person by whom, the occasion wherein, and the purpose for which they are spoken, that they cannot be detached and set out by themselves without thwarting or greatly marring their force and flavour. Thus in the farthest extremities of the work we feel the beatings of one common heart. On the whole, we may safely affirm with Dr. Johnson, that "perhaps no author has ever, in two plays, afforded so much delight."

KING HENRY THE FIFTH.

The Life of Henry the Fifth, as it is called in the folio of 1623, was registered, along with *As You Like It*, at the Stationers', August 4, 1600, but was locked up from the press under an order "to be stayed." In respect of

As You Like It the stay seems to have been continued; but not so in regard to the other, as this was entered again on the 14th of the same month, and was published in the course of that year. The same text was reissued in 1602, and again in 1608. In these editions, known as the quartos, the author's name was not given: the play, moreover, was but about half as long as we have it; the Choruses, the whole of the first scene, and also many other passages, those too among the best in the play, and even in the whole compass of the Poet's works, being wanting altogether. All these, besides more or less of enlargement in a great many places, together with the marks of a careful finishing hand running through the whole, were supplied in the folio of 1623; which, accordingly, is our only *authority* for the text, though the quartos yield valuable aid towards correcting the errors and curing the defects of that copy.

That the issue of 1600 was surreptitious is on all hands allowed. But there has been much controversy whether it was printed from a full and perfect copy of the play as first written, or from a mangled and mutilated copy, such as could be made up by unauthorized and incompetent reporters. Many things might be urged on either side of this question; but as no certain conclusion seems likely to be reached, the discussion probably may as well be spared. Perhaps the most considerable argument for the former position is, that the quarto has in some cases several consecutive lines precisely as they stand in the folio; while, on the other hand, of many of the longest and best passages in the folio the quarto has no traces whatever. But this is nowise decisive of the point either way, because, granting that some person or persons undertook to report the play as spoken, it is not impossible that he or they may have taken down some parts very carefully, and omitted others altogether. And the Editors of the folio tell us in their Preface that there were "divers stolen and surreptitious copies, maimed and deformed by the frauds and stealths of injurious impostors that exposed them."

And here it may not be unfitting to remark that in other cases, as especially in *Hamlet*, we have strong and even conclusive evidence of the Poet's plays having been carefully rewritten and vastly improved after the original draughts of them had been made. Nor is it unlikely that some of them underwent this process more than once. And the fact is of consequence as refuting what used to be, and perhaps still is, the common notion, that Shakespeare's best workmanship was struck out with little or no labour of reflection and study. Assuredly it was not without severe and patient exercise of thought that he achieved his miracles of poetry and art, and won his place as the greatest of human intellects. We have been taught to think of him as a prodigy of genius going rather by nature and instinct than by reason and purpose, and beating all other men because he could not help it: whereas in truth his judgment was fully equal to his genius; and his greatness stands in nothing else so much as in just that solidity and sobriety of understanding which comes by industry and application, and by making the best use of one's native gifts. And the instance of *King Henry the Fifth* yields pregnant matter in this behalf; the difference between the quarto and folio copies in that case not being greater than between the first and second quartos of *Hamlet*.

In the Epilogue to *King Henry the Fourth* the speaker says, "Our humble author will continue the story, with Sir John in it, and make you merry with fair Catharine of France." Whether this promise was directly authorized by Shakespeare, we cannot positively say, as that Epilogue was probably not of his writing; but there is little doubt that the play to which it is affixed was written as early as 1597. That the play now in hand was written soon after the date of that promise, is highly probable. On the other hand, in the Chorus to Act v. we have the following:

> "Were now the general of our gracious Empress
> (As in good time he may) from Ireland coming,

> Bringing rebellion broachèd on his sword,
> How many would the peaceful city quit,
> To welcome him!"

This undoubtedly refers to the Earl of Essex, who went on his expedition against the Irish rebels in April, 1599, and returned in September following. That Chorus, therefore, and probably the others also, was written somewhere between those two dates. The most likely conclusion, then, seems to be, that the first draught of the play was made in 1597 or 1598; that the whole was rewritten, enlarged, and the Choruses added during the absence of Essex, in the Summer of 1599; and that a copy of the first draught was obtained for the press, fraudulently, after it had been superseded on the stage by the enlarged and finished copy.

In this play, as in *King Henry the Fourth*, the historical matter was taken from Holinshed, both the substance and the order of the events being much the same as they are given by the historian. The King came to the throne in March, 1413, being then twenty-six years old. The Parliament with which the play opens was held in the Spring of 1414, and the King's marriage with Catharine took place in the Spring of 1420; so that the time of the action is measured by that interval.

The civil troubles which so much harassed the preceding reign naturally started the young King upon the policy of busying his subjects in foreign quarrels; "that action, hence borne out, might waste the memory of the former days." At the Parliament just mentioned a proposition was made, and met with great favour, to convert a large amount of Church property to the uses of the State; which put the Clergy upon adding the weighty arguments of their means and counsel in furtherance of the same policy; inasmuch as they judged that the best way to prevent a spoiling of the Church was by engaging all minds in a transport of patriotic fervour. King Henry derived his claim to the throne of France from Isabella, Queen of Edward the Second, and daughter of Philip the Fair; he being the fourth

in a direct line of descent from that celebrated woman. This Philip had left two sons, both of whom died without male issue; whereupon the crown passed to Charles the Fair, the youngest brother of Philip. In effect, the English King was easily persuaded that the Salique law had no right to bar him from the throne of France; and ambassadors were sent over to demand the French crown and all its dependencies; the King offering withal to take the Princess Catharine in marriage, and endow her with a part of the possessions claimed; at the same time threatening that, if this were not done, "he would recover his right and inheritance with mortal war and dint of sword." An embassy being soon after received from France, the demand was renewed, and peremptorily insisted on. The French King being then incapable of rule, the government was in the hands of the Dauphin, who saw fit to play off some merry taunts on the English monarch, referring to his former pranks; whereupon the latter dismissed the ambassadors, bidding them tell their master that within three months he would enter France as his own true and lawful patrimony, "meaning to acquire the same, not with big words, but with the deeds of men."

This took place in June, 1415. Before the end of July the King's preparations were complete, and his army landed at Harfleur on the 15th of August. By the 22d of September the town was brought to an unconditional surrender, and put in the keeping of an English garrison. The English army was now reduced to about half its original numbers; nevertheless the King, having first challenged the Dauphin to single combat, and getting no answer, took the bold resolution of marching through several provinces to Calais. After a slow and toilsome march, during which they suffered much from famine and hostile attacks, the army came within sight of Agincourt, where the French were strongly posted, so that Henry must either surrender or cut his way through them. The French army spent the following night in revelry and debate, and in fixing the ran-

som of King Henry and his nobles. The night being cold dark, and rainy, many fires were kindled in both camps; and the English, worn out with labour, want, and sickness, passed the hours in anxious preparation, making their wills and saying their prayers, and hearing every now and then peals of laughter and merriment from the French lines. During most of the night the King was moving about among his men, scattering words of comfort and hope in their ears, and arranging the order of battle; and before sunrise he had them called to matins, and from prayers led them into the field. From the confident bearing of the French it was supposed they would hasten to begin the fight, but when it was found that they kept within their lines, the King gave order to advance upon them. The battle continued with the utmost fury for three hours, and resulted in the death of ten thousand Frenchmen, five hundred of whom had been knighted the day before. Some report that not above twenty-five of the English were slain; others affirm the number to have been not less than five or six hundred.

The news of this victory caused infinite rejoicing in England, and the King soon hastened over to receive the congratulations of his people. When he arrived at Dover, the crowd plunged into the waves to meet him, and carried him in their arms from the vessel to the beach: all the way to London was one triumphal procession: Lords, Commons, Clergy, Mayor, Aldermen, and citizens flocked forth to welcome him: pageants were set up in the streets, wine ran in conduits, bands of children sang his praise; and, in short, the whole population were in a perfect ecstasy of joy.

During his stay in England, the King was visited by several great personages, the Emperor Sigismund being one of them, who came to mediate a peace between him and France. The Emperor was entertained with great magnificence, but his mission accomplished nothing to the purpose. After divers attempts at a settlement by negotiation, the King renewed the war in 1417, and in August landed

in Normandy with an army. From that time he had an almost uninterrupted career of conquest till the Spring of 1420, when all his demands were granted, and himself publicly affianced to the Princess Catharine.

From this sketch it may well be judged that the matter was not altogether fitted for dramatic use, as it gave too little scope for those developments of character and passion wherein the interest of the serious drama mainly consists. For, as Schlegel remarks, "war is an epic rather than a dramatic subject: to yield the right interest for the stage, it must be the means whereby something else is accomplished, and not the last aim and substance of the whole." And perhaps it was a sense of this unfitness of the matter for dramatic use that led the Poet, upon the revisal, to pour through the work so large a measure of the lyrical element, thus penetrating and filling it with the efficacy of a grand national song of triumph. Hence comes it that the play is so thoroughly charged with the spirit and poetry of a sort of jubilant patriotism, of which the King himself is probably the most eloquent impersonation ever delineated. Viewed in this light, the piece, however inferior to others in dramatic effect, is as perfect in its way as any thing the Poet has given us. And it has a peculiar value as indicating what Shakespeare might have done in other forms of poetry, had he been so minded; the Choruses in general, and especially that to the fourth Act, being unrivalled in spirit, clearness, and force. — Of course the play has its unity in the hero; who is never for a moment out of our feelings: even when he is most absent or unseen, the thought and expression still relish of him; and the most prosaic parts are touched with a certain grace and effluence from him.

For some cause or other, the promise, already quoted, touching the continuation of Sir John was not made good. Falstaff does not once appear in the play. I suspect that when the author went to planning the drama, he saw the impracticability of making any thing more out of him;

while there was at least some danger lest the part should degenerate into clap-trap. And indeed the very fact of such a promise being made might well infer a purpose rather too theatrical for the just rights of truth and art. At all events, Sir John's dramatic office and mission were clearly at an end when his connection with Prince Henry was broken off; the design of the character being to explain the Prince's wild and riotous courses. Besides, Falstaff must have had so much of manhood in him as to love the Prince, else he were too bad a man for the Prince to be with; and when he was so sternly cast off, the grief of this wound must in all reason have sadly palsied his sport-making powers. To have continued him with his wits shattered or crippled, had been flagrant injustice to him; to have continued him with his wits sound and in good trim, had been something unjust to the Prince.

To be sure, Falstaff repenting and reforming might be a much better man; but in that capacity he was not for us. In such a man as he has been, the process of repentance must be secret, else it would not be edifying; and to set it forth upon the stage as matter of public amusement, were a clear instance of profanation. Such a thing ought never to be shown at all, save as it transpires silently in the fruits of an amended life. So that the Poet did well to keep Falstaff in retirement where, though his once matchless powers no longer give us pleasure, yet the report of his sufferings gently touches our pity, and recovers him to our human sympathies. And when at last the Hostess tells us "the King has killed his heart," what a volume of redeeming matter is suggested concerning him! We then for the first time begin to respect him as a man, because we see that he has a heart as well as a brain; and that his heart is big and strong enough to outwrestle his profligacy, and give death the advantage of him. And it is observable that those who see much of him, although they do not respect him, and can but stand amazed at his overpowering freshets of humour, nevertheless get strongly attached to him. This

is especially the case with that strangely-interesting creature, Mrs. Quickly; and now we can hardly choose but think the better both of Falstaff and of Bardolph, when, the former having died, and a question being raised as to where he has gone, the latter says, "Would I were with him, wheresome'er he is, either in Heaven or in Hell!" In Quickly's account of his last moments there is a pathos to which I know of nothing similar, and which is as touching as it is peculiar. It is in Shakespeare's choicest vein of humour. — His make-up being so original, and so plenipotent in wit and humour, it was but natural that Sir John, upon his departure, should leave some audible vibrations in the air behind him. The last of these dies away upon the ear when Fluellen uses him to point a moral; and this reference, so queerly characteristic of the speaker, is abundantly grateful as serving to start up a swarm of laughing memories.

In the comic portions of this play we have a fresh illustration of the Poet's versatility and range of genius. There is indeed nothing here that comes up to the earlier scenes at Eastcheap: so much is implied in the absence of Falstaff; for nothing else in the comic line can be expected to equal that delineation. But Hostess Quickly reappears as Mrs. Pistol, the same character, but running into an amusing variety of development: the swaggering Pistol is also the same as before, only in a somewhat more efflorescent stage; ranting out with greater gust than ever the picked-up fustian of the bear-garden and the play-house; a very fuliginous pistol — without fire: Bardolph, too, with his "face all bubukles, and whelks, and knobs, and flames of fire," but advanced in rank, and carrying a sense of higher importance. With these we have an altogether original addition in Corporal Nym, a delineation of low character in the Poet's most realistic style; with a vein of humour so lifelike as to seem a literal transcript from fact; while the native vulgarity of the man is kept from being disgusting by the

freshness and spirit with which his characteristic traits are delivered.

These three good-for-nothing profligates are a fitting example of the human refuse and scum which lately gravitated round Sir John; and they serve the double purpose of carrying into the new scenes the memory of the King's former associations, and also of evincing the King's present severity and rectitude of discipline. They thus help to bridge over the chasm, which might else appear something too abrupt, between what the hero was as Prince of Wales and what he is as King: therewithal their presence shows him acting out the purpose, which he avowed at our first meeting with him, of imitating the Sun, who causes himself to be more wondered at

> "By breaking through the foul and ugly mists
> Of vapours that did seem to strangle him."

That some such clouds of vileness exhaled from the old haunts of his discarded life should still hang about his path, was natural in the course of things, and may be set down as a judicious point in the drama.

I have elsewhere* observed somewhat upon the remarkable character of the Boy who figures as servant to "these three swashers." He is probably the same whom we met with as Page to Falstaff in the preceding play. His arch and almost unconscious shrewdness of remark was even then a taking feature; and it encouraged the thought of his having enough healthy keenness of perception to ward off the taints and corruptions that beset him. And he now translates the follies and vices of his employers into apt themes of sagacious and witty reflection, touching at every point the very pith of their distinctive features. The mixture of penetration and simplicity with which he moralizes their pretentious nothings is very charming. Thus Pistol's turbulent vapourings draw from him the sage remark, "I did never know so full a voice issue from so empty a heart: but the saying is true, *The empty vessel makes the greatest*

* Volume i. page 171.

sound. Bardolph and Nym had ten times more valour than this roaring Devil i' the old play, and they are both hang'd; and so would this be, if he durst steal any thing adventurously." Shakespeare specially delights in thus endowing his children and youngsters with a kind of unsophisticated shrewdness, the free outcome of a native soundness that enables them to walk unhurt amid the contagions of bad example; their own minds being kept pure, and even furthered in the course of manhood, by an instinctive oppugnance to the shams and meannesses which beset their path.

But the comic life of the drama is mainly centred in a very different group of persons. Fluellen, Jamy, and Macmorris strike out an entirely fresh and original vein of entertainment; and these, together with Bates and Williams, aptly represent the practical, working soldiership of the King's army. The conceited and loquacious Welshman, the tenacious and argumentative Scotchman, the hot and impulsive Irishman, with all whose nations the English have lately been at war, serve the further purpose of displaying how smoothly the recent national enmities have been reconciled, and all the parties drawn into harmonious co-operation, by the King's inspiring nobleness of character, and the catching enthusiasm of his enterprise. All three are as brave as lions, thoroughly devoted to the cause, and mutually emulous of doing good service; each entering into the work with as much heartiness as if his own nation were at the head of the undertaking. All of them too are completely possessed with the spirit of the occasion, where "honour's thought reigns solely in the breast of every man"; and as there is no swerving from the line of earnest warlike purpose in quest of any sport or pastime, so the amusement we have of them results purely from the spontaneous working-out of their innate peculiarities; and while making us laugh they at the same time win our respect, their very oddities serving to set off their substantial manliness.

Fluellen is pedantic, pragmatical, and somewhat querulous, but withal a thoroughly honest and valiant soul. He loves to hear himself discourse touching "the true discipline of the wars," and about "Alexander the Pig," and how "Fortune is painted plind, with a muffler afore her eyes, to signify to you that Fortune is plind; and she is painted also with a wheel, to signify to you, which is the moral of it, that she is turning, and inconstant, and mutability, and variation": but then he is also prompt to own that "Captain Jamy is a marvellous falorous gentleman, and of great expedition and knowledge in th' aunchient wars"; and that "he will maintain his argument as well as any military man in the 'orld, in the disciplines of the pristine wars of the Romans." He is indeed rather easily gulled into thinking Pistol a hero, on hearing him "utter as prave 'ords at the pridge as you shall see in a Summer's day": this lapse, however, is amply squared when he cudgels the swagger out of the "counterfeit rascal," and persuades him to eat the leek, and then makes him accept a groat to "heal his proken pate"; which is one of Shakespeare's raciest and most spirited comic scenes. Herewith should be noted also his cool discretion in putting up with the mouthing braggart's insolence, because the time and place did not properly allow his resenting it on the spot: and when he calls on him to "eat his victuals," and gives him the cudgel for sauce to it; and tells him, "You called me yesterday mountain-squire, but I will make you to-day a squire of low degree"; there is no mistaking the timber he is made of.

On another occasion, Fluellen sharply reproves one of his superior officers for loud-talking in the camp at night: "If you would take the pains but to examine the wars of Pompey the Great, you shall find, I warrant you, that there is no tiddle-taddle nor pibble-pabble in Pompey's camp": and the King, overhearing this reproof, hits the white of his character when he says to himself, —

> "Though it appear a little out of fashion,
> There is much care and valour in the Welshman."

But perhaps the man's most characteristic passage is in his plain and downright style of speech to the King himself: the latter referring to the place of his own birth, which was in Wales, addresses him as "my good countryman," and he replies, "I am your Majesty's countryman, I care not who know it; I will confess it to all the 'orld: I need not be ashamed of your Majesty, praised be Got, so long as your Majesty is an honest man." On the whole, Fluellen is a capital instance of the Poet's consideration for the rights of manhood irrespective of rank or title or any adventitious regards. Though a very subordinate person in the drama, there is more wealth of genius shown in the delineation of him than of any other except the King.

The delineation of the King, as I have remarked in another place,* has something of peculiar interest from its personal relation to the author. It embodies the Poet's ethics of character. Here, for once, he relaxes his strictness of dramatic self-reserve, and lets us directly into his own conception of what is good and noble: in his other portraits we have the art and genius of the poet; here, along with this, is also reflected the conscience and heart of the man.

The King is the most complex and many-sided of all Shakespeare's heroes, with the one exception of Hamlet; if indeed even Hamlet ought to be excepted. He is great alike in thought, in purpose, and in performance; all the parts of his character drawing together perfectly, as if there were no foothold for distraction among them. Truth, sweetness, and terror build in him equally. And he loves the plain presence of natural and homely characters, where all is genuine, forthright, and sincere. Even in his sternest actions as king, he shows, he cannot help showing, the motions of a brotherly heart: there is a certain grace and suavity in his very commands, causing them to be felt as benedictions. To be frank, open, and affable with all sorts

* Volume i. page 247.

of persons, so as to call their very hearts into their mouths, and move them to be free, plain-spoken, and simple in his company, as losing the sense of inferior rank in an equality of manhood, — all this is both an impulse of nature and a rule of judgment with him. Nothing contents him short of getting heart to heart with those about or beneath him: all conventional starch, all official forms, all the facings of pride, that stand in the way of this, he breaks through; yet he does this with so much natural dignity and ease, that those who see it are scarcely sensible of it: they feel a peculiar graciousness in him, but know not why. And in his practical sense of things, as well as in his theory, inward merit is the only basis of kingly right and rule: yet he is so much at home in this thought, that he never emphasizes it at all; because he understands full well that such merit, where it really lives, will best make its way when left to itself, and that any boasting or putting on airs about it can only betray a lack of it.

Thus the character of this crowned gentleman stands together in that native harmony and beauty which is most adorned in being unadorned. And his whole behaviour appears to be governed by an instinctive sense of this. There is no simulation, no disguise, no study for appearances, about him: all got-up dignities, any thing put on for effect, whatever savours in the least of sham or shoddy, is his aversion; and the higher the place where it is used, the more he feels it to be out of place; his supreme delight being to seem just what he is, and to be just what he seems. In other words, he has a steadfast, living, operative faith in the plenipotence of truth: he wants nothing better; he scorns to rely on any thing less: this is the soul of all his thoughts and designs. The sense of any discrepancy between his inward and his outward parts would be a torment to him. Hence his unaffected heartiness in word and deed. Whatsoever he cannot enter into with perfect wholeness and integrity of mind, that he shrinks from having any thing to do with. Accordingly in all that flows from him

we feel the working of a heart so full that it cannot choose but overflow. Perhaps indeed he has never heard it said that "an honest man 's the noblest work of God"; perhaps he has never even thought it consciously; but it is the core of his practical thinking; he lives it, and therefore knows it by heart, if not by head.

This explains what are deemed the looser parts of his conduct while Prince of Wales. For his character, through all its varieties of transpiration in the three plays where he figures, is perfectly coherent and all of a piece. In the air of the Court there was something, he hardly knew what, that cut against his grain; he could not take to it. His father was indeed acting a noble part, and was acting it nobly; at least the Prince thought so: still he could not but feel that his father was acting a part. Dissimulation, artifice, official fiction, attentiveness to show, and all that course of dealing where less is meant than meets the ear, were too much the style and habit of the place: policy was the method, astuteness the force, of the royal counsels; and plain truth was not deep enough for one who held it so much his interest to hoodwink the time. Even the virtue there cherished was in great part a made-up, surface virtue; at the best there was a spice of disingenuousness in it. In short, the whole administration of the State manifestly took its shape and tone from the craft of the King, not from the heart of the man.

To the Prince's keen eye all this was evident, to his healthy feelings it was offensive; he craved the fellowship of something more fresh and genuine; and was glad to get away from it, and play with simpler and honester natures, where he could at least be frank and true, and where his spirits might run out in natural freedom. "Covering discretion with a coat of folly" was better in his sense of things than to have his native sensibilities smothered under such a varnish of solemn plausibility and factitious constraint. Even his inborn rectitude found a more congenial climate where no virtue at all was professed, and where its claims

were frankly sported off, than where there was so much of sinister craft and indirection mixed up with it: the reckless and spontaneous outpourings of moral looseness, nay, the haunts of open-faced profligacy, so they had some sparkling of wit and raciness of humour in them, were more to his taste than the courts of refined hypocrisy and dissimulation, where politicians played at hide-and-seek with truth, and tied up their schemes with shreds of Holy Writ.

Still it should be noted withal, that during his intercourse with Falstaff the Prince was all the while growing better, whereas Falstaff was daily growing worse. This was because the former was secretly intent on picking out the good, the latter the evil, of that intercourse. With the one it was a process of free and generous self-abandon; with the other, of greedy and sensual self-seeking. So the Prince went into the Gadshill robbery merely as a frolic; the jest of the thing was what he looked to; and he took care to have all the money paid back to the losers. On the other hand, Falstaff's sole thought was to snatch the means of self-indulgence; and so the act was all of a piece with his cheating the Hostess out of her hard-earned cash by practising on her simple-hearted kindness; and with his laying a plot to swindle Shallow, expressly on the ground that, "if the young dace be a bait for the old pike, I see no reason in the law of nature but I may snap at him."

And it seems to me a very mark-worthy point in that great delineation, that while Falstaff was thus preparing for those darker villainies, the Prince was silently feeding the nobler mind which in due time prompted an utter repudiation of Sir John. At all events, whatever perils there might be in such companionship, I must needs think that even in the haunts of Eastcheap, as Shakespeare orders them, the Prince had a larger and richer school of practical wisdom; that he could there learn more of men, of moral good and evil, could get a clearer insight of the strengths and weaknesses of the human heart, and touch more springs of noble thought and purpose, than in any college of made-

up appearances, where truth is so adulterated with cunning, that the mind insensibly loses its simplicity, and sucks in perversion under the names of dignity and prudence.

Accordingly, I suppose the Prince's course in this matter to have grown mainly from the one pregnant fact, that his tongue could not endure the taste of falsehood, nor his hand the touch of fraud. And because, from his fulness of inward worth, he must and would be true, and rejoiced in what was simple and candid and direct, and hated all disguise and pretence and make-believe, therefore his mind on all sides moved in contact with the truth and life of things. Thus the dangerous experiences he had with revellers and make-sports were to him a discipline of virtue and wisdom: he found at least more of natural sap in them than in the walking costumes from which they withdrew him: the good that was in them he could retain, the ill he could discard, because the former had something in him to stick upon, which the latter had not: and he knew that the noblest fruit would grow larger and ripen better in the generous soil where weeds also grew, than in the dry enclosures where nature and soul-power were repressed, to make room for craft-power and artifice. Yet even then, as often as he had any manly work to do, an answering spirit of manliness was forthwith kindled within him, and the course of riot and mirth was instantly shaken off as at the touch of a stronger affinity. To apply one of Bacon's fine sayings, when once his mind had placed before it noble aims, it was immediately surrounded not only by the virtues, but by the gods.

The Prince knew himself to be under a cloud of ill thoughts and surmises; that he was held in slight esteem by his companions, his kindred, and his foes; that even Pointz put a bad construction on his behaviour; that his brothers gave him up, and his father viewed him with reproach and distrust; that in the glory of Hotspur's deeds himself was quite eclipsed; that every man was forethinking him a hopeless reprobate, and was shaking the head at the sound of his name: but all this did not appear to move him; still

he seemed unconcerned, and intent only on playing out his game; untouched with compunctious visitings, and digesting his shames as quietly as if he were not aware of them.

This seeming insensibility was because he had at bottom the strength of a good conscience, and a firm trust in the might of truth: "rotten opinion" did not inwardly gall him, because he felt sure that in due time he should raze it out, and was content to abide his time. He had tried himself in noble work, and knew how sweet was the conscience of having done it like a man, and also knew that his inner mind on this score was a profound secret to those about him: the imputation of certain faults did not worry him, because he knew it was not really deserved; yet he was far from blaming others for it, because he also knew it seemed to be deserved; and in his modest disdain of show he could quietly face the misconstructions of the hour, and remain true to himself in the calm assurance that all would come right in the end. But especially his course of life and the ill repute it drew upon him exempted him from the pestilence of lordly flatterers and buzzing sycophants; and he might well deem the scenes of his mirth to be health and purity itself in comparison with an atmosphere sweetened with that penetrating defilement: if there was a devil in the former, it was at least an undisguised devil; which was vastly better than a devil sugared over so as to cheat the taste, and seduce the moral sentinels of the heart.

The character of Shakespeare's Henry the Fifth may almost be said to consist of piety, honesty, and modesty. And he embodies these qualities in their simplest and purest form; all sitting so easy and natural in him that he thinks not of them. Then too, which is well worth the noting, they so draw and work together, that each may be affirmed of the others; that is, he is honest and modest in his piety, pious and modest in his honesty; so that there is nothing obtrusive or showy in his acting of these virtues: being solid and true, they are therefore much within and little without,

and are perfectly free from any air of pretence or design. And all the other manly virtues gather upon him in the train of these; while, as before remarked, at the centre of the whole stands a serene faith in the sufficiency of truth.

The practical working of this choice composure is well shown in what happened at the killing of Hotspur. No sooner had Prince Henry slain the valiant Percy than he fell at once to doing him the offices of pious and tender reverence; and the rather, forasmuch as no human eye witnessed the act. He knew that the killing of Hotspur would be enough of itself to wipe out all his shames, and "restore him into the good thoughts of the world again"; nevertheless he cheerfully resigned the credit of the deed to Falstaff. He knew that such a surreptitious honour would help his old companion in the way wherein he was most capable and needy of help; while, for himself, he could forego the fame of it in the secret pledge it gave him of other and greater achievements: the inward conscience thereof sufficed him; and the sense of having done a generous thing was dearer to him than the beguiling sensation of "riding in triumph on men's tongues." This noble superiority to the breath of present applause is what most clearly evinces the solidity and inwardness of his virtue.

Yet in one of his kingliest moments he tells us, "If it be a sin to covet honour, I am the most offending soul alive." But honour is with him in the highest sense a social conscience, and the rightful basis of self-respect: he deems it a good chiefly as it makes a man clean and strong within, and not as it dwells in the fickle breath of others. As for that conventional figment which small souls make so much ado about, he cares little for it, as knowing that it is often got without merit, and lost without deserving. Thus the honour he covets is really to deserve the good thoughts of men: the inward sense of such desert is enough: if what is fairly his due in that kind be withheld by them, the loss is theirs, not his.

Another characteristic article of his creed is that "in

peace there 's nothing so becomes a man as modest stillness and humility." In his former days, during the intervals of high work, he was a spendthrift of his time, and cared mainly to pass it away from the pressure of irksome and benumbing constraint; but, now that high work claims all his hours, "ease from this noble miser of his time no moment steals"; and he pushes ahead as one

> "Who, not content that former worth stand fast,
> Looks forward, persevering to the last,
> From well to better, daily self-surpast."

In his clear rectitude and piety of purpose, he will not go to war with France till he believes religiously and in his conscience that he has a sacred right to the French crown, and that it would be a sin against the divinely-appointed order of human society not to prosecute that claim. This point settled, he goes about the task as if his honour and salvation hung upon it. And in putting it through he is at once collected and eager, gentle and terrible; full alike of warlike energy and of bland repose: his faith in the justice of his cause and in the Divine support renders him both earnest and tranquil; and he alternates with majestic grace between the stirrings of his plain homely nature and of his kingly heroic spirit, or blends them both in one as the occasion speaks.

The King, however, has one conspicuous lapse from modesty. The pompous brags of the French spouted through their Herald betray him into a brief but rather high strain of bragging, as if he had caught the disease of them: but he presently catches himself in it and chides himself for it: the words nauseate him, and he forthwith spits them out; and he is disgusted with himself till he has washed out the taste of them with repentance. So that the result just proves how sound and sincere that virtue is in him. At the same time, with characteristic impulsive frankness, he discloses to the enemy the badness of his own plight:

> "My people are with sickness much enfeebled;
> My numbers lessen'd, and those few I have
> Almost no better than so many French."

Nor is this a thoughtless act; for in the same breath he owns that "'tis no wisdom to confess so much unto an enemy of craft and vantage"; but then it is the simple truth, and truth is good enough for him: moreover his frankness, whether he means it so or not, helps him in the end; for it has the effect of dissolving still further the bands of order among the French, making them more negligent, presumptuous, and giddy than ever.

Nor is he wanting in the qualities of a discreet and prudent general. His quick and circumspective eye takes in all the parts of military duty. In his method, cool strategic judgment goes hand in hand with daring impetuous courage. He understands, none better, the requirements of sound policy in war. Justice and humanity to non-combatants are cardinal points of discipline with him, and this not only as according with his temper, but as helpers to success. Besides, he looks upon the French people as his own, and therefore will not have them wronged or oppressed by his soldiers. Bardolph and Nym are hanged for theft and sacrilege, and he "would have all such offenders so cut off"; and he gives express charge that "nothing be taken but paid for; none of the French upbraided or abused in disdainful language"; his avowed reason being, that "when lenity and cruelty play for a kingdom, the gentler gamester is the soonest winner."

But, with all his stress of warlike ardour and intentness, his mind full of cares, thoughtful, provident, self-mastered as he is, his old frank and childlike playfulness and love of harmless fun still cling to him, and mingle genially in his working earnestness. Even in his gravest passages, with but one or two exceptions, as in his address to the conspirant lords, there is a dash of jocose humour that is charmingly reminiscent of his most jovial and sportive hours. When "consideration like an angel came, and whipp'd the offending Adam out of him," it put no stiffness or sourness into his manners, nor had any effect towards withering him up from being still the prince of good fellows. His spirits

are none the less brisk and sprightly for being bound in with the girdle of temperance and conscientious rectitude. He can be considerate and playful too; self-restrained and running over with fresh hilarity at the same time.

Perhaps the fairest display of his whole varied make-up is in the night before the battle of Agincourt, when, wrapping himself in a borrowed cloak, he goes unrecognized about the camp, allaying the scruples, cheering the hearts, and bracing the courage of his men. His free and kindly nature is so unsubdued and fresh, that he craves to be a man among his soldiers, and talk familiarly with them face to face, which he knows could not be if he appeared among them as King. Here too his love of plain unvarnished truth asserts itself: he does not attempt to disguise from himself or from them the huge perils of their situation; he owns that the odds are fearfully against them; because he trusts that all this, instead of appalling their hearts, will rather serve, as indeed it does, to knit up their energies to a more resolute and strenuous effort. The greater the danger they are in, the greater should their courage be, — that is the principle he acts upon, and he has faith that they will act upon it too: he would have them know the worst of their condition, because he doubts not that they will be all the surer to meet it like men, dying gloriously, if die they must; and he so frames his speech that it works in them as an inspiration to that effect. Speaking to them of himself in the third person, he says, "I think the King is but a man, as I am: the violet smells to him as it doth to me; all his senses have but human conditions: and though his affections are higher mounted than ours, yet, when they stoop, they stoop with the like wing": and on his conscience he assures them of what is indeed true, that the King "would not wish himself anywhere but where he is." From the overweening confidence of the French, leading to profanity and dissoluteness, he gathers the lessons of an heroic piety:

> "There is some soul of goodness in things evil,
> Would men observingly distil it out;

For our bad neighbour makes us early stirrers,
Which is both healthful and good husbandry:
Besides, they are our outward consciences,
And preachers to us all; admonishing
That we should 'dress us fairly for our end.
Thus may we gather honey from the weed,
And make a moral of the Devil himself."

I have elsewhere observed how Shakespeare used the Choruses in this play for the purpose of unbosoming himself in regard to his favourite hero. His own personal sense of the King's nocturnal doings is most unequivocally pronounced in the Chorus to the fourth Act:

"For forth he goes, and visits all his host;
Bids them good morrow with a modest smile,
And calls them brothers, friends, and countrymen.
Upon his royal face there is no note
How dread an army hath enrounded him;
Nor doth he dedicate one jot of colour
Unto the weary and all-watchèd night;
But freshly looks, and overbears attaint
With cheerful semblance and sweet majesty;
That every wretch, pining and pale before,
Beholding him, plucks comfort from his looks:
A largess universal, like the Sun,
His liberal eye doth give to every one,
Thawing cold fear; that mean and gentle all
Behold, as may unworthiness define,
A little touch of Harry in the night."

But the best of it is, that all the deep seriousness, not to say gloom, of the occasion does not repress his native jocularity of spirit. John Bates and Michael Williams, whose hearts are indeed braver and better than their words, speak out their doubts and fears with all plainness; and he falls at once into a strain of grave and apt discourse that soon satisfies their minds, which have been rendered somewhat querulous by the plight they are in; and when the blunt and downright Williams pushes his freedom into something of sauciness, he meets it with bland good-humour, and melts out the man's crustiness by contriving quite in his

old style for carrying on a practical joke; so that we have a right taste of the sportive Prince in the most trying and anxious passage of the King. In the same spirit, afterwards, when the jest is coming to the upshot, as it is likely to breed some bloody work, he takes care that no harm shall be done: he turns it into an occasion for letting the men know whom they had talked so freely with: he has himself invited their freedom of speech, because in his full-souled frankness of nature he really loves to be inward with them, and to taste the honest utterance of their minds: and when, upon that disclosure, Williams still uses his former plainness, he likes him the better for it; and winds up the jest by rewarding his supposed offence with a glove full of crowns; thus ending the whole with a stroke of genuine magnanimity, such as cannot fail to secure the undivided empire of his soldiers' hearts: henceforth they will make nothing of dying for such a noble fellow, whose wish clearly is, not to overawe them by any studied dignity, but to reign within them by his manliness of soul, and by making them feel that he is their best friend.

The same merry, frolicsome humour comes out again in his wooing of the Princess Catharine. It is a real holiday of the spirits with him; his mouth overruns with play; he cracks jokes upon his own person and his speaking of French; and sweetens his way to the lady's heart by genial frankness and simplicity of manner; wherein we relish nothing of the King indeed, but, which is better, much of the man. With the open and true-hearted pleasantry of a child, he laughs through his courtship; yet we feel all the while a deep undercurrent of seriousness beneath his laughter; and there is to our sense no lapse from dignity in his behaviour, because nothing is really so dignified as when a man forgets his dignity in the overflowings of a right noble and generous heart. The King loves men who are better than their words; and it is his nature to be better than he speaks: this is the artless disguise of modesty through which true goodness has its most effective disclosure; while,

on the other hand, we naturally distrust the beauty that is not something shy of letting its charms be seen. — I must add that, bearing in mind the well-known character and history of King Henry the Sixth, we cannot fail to take it as a signal stroke of irony when the hero, in his courtship, speaks to the Princess of their "compounding a boy, half French, half English, that shall go to Constantinople, and take the Turk by the beard." This is one of those highly artful, yet seemingly-spontaneous sallies with which the Poet delights to play out his deep insight of character, and to surprise or to laugh his readers into a knowledge of themselves. — It is also to be noted that, notwithstanding the hero's sportive mood in the wooing, when he comes to deal with the terms of peace, where he thinks the honour of his nation is involved, his mood is very different: then he purposely forgot the King in the man; now he resolutely forgets the man in the King; and will not budge a hair from the demands which he holds to be the right of his people. The dignity of his person he freely leaves to take care of itself; the dignity of his State is to him a sacred thing, and he will sooner die than compromise it a jot.

In respect of piety, the King exemplifies whatever was best in the teaching and practice of his time. Nor, upon the whole, is it altogether certain that any thing better has arisen since his time. What appears as modesty in his dealings with men here takes the form of humility, deep and unaffected; he thinks, speaks, and acts in the fear of God: this trait is indeed the central point, the very core of the whole delineation. Shakespeare found the King highly extolled in Holinshed for his piety at home, and throughout his campaigns; he accepted the matter most heartily, but construed it in a truly liberal spirit, and wrought it purposely into the brightest feature of his hero. Thus at the outset the King's demeanour is marked by calm, unobtrusive notes of severe conscientiousness: he is above all anxious that his enterprise have the Divine approval; nor are

his scruples on this score any the less genuine, that he does not assume to be himself the sole ultimate judge of right and duty, but refers it to the judgment of those who stand to him as authorized interpreters of the Divine will. Then he takes it as a direct interposal of Providence, and a gracious mark of the Divine favour, that the "dangerous treason, lurking in his way," is brought to light. And all through he takes care to instruct himself and to have his men instructed, that they are to place their sole reliance in God's help, to seek that help by piety and rectitude of life, and not to arrogate to themselves the merit of success, nor get puffed with a conceit of their own sufficiency. On the eve of the battle, he remembers, from his father's own mouth, the wrongs his father did in compassing the crown, and religiously fears lest the sins of the father in this case be visited on the son: in this pious and penitential thought he craves to be alone, that "he and his bosom may debate awhile"; and then, after reciting some of the "good and pious works" which he has done to atone the fault, he adds, with heartfelt humility, "More will I do; though all that I can do is nothing worth." And while the French are revelling out the night in vanity and insolence, he has his soldiers put upon fortifying their courage, and seeking to bring good out of evil, by solemn acts of repentance and prayer. So again, after the great victory, which he in his pious solicitude is slow to credit the report of, his first word is, "Praisèd be God, and not our strength, for it!" and later, when the results of the battle are fully ascertained, "O God, Thy arm was here, and not to us, but to Thy arm alone ascribe we all." And his sincerity in all this is approved by the order he takes that there be no voice of boasting or arrogance on account of what has been done, and that the Divine gift of victory be devoutly acknowledged in "all holy rites." How the Poet himself regarded these marks of Christian piety and humility in his hero, well appears from the account given of the King's reception at London, in the Chorus to Act v.:

"Whereas his lords desire him to have borne
His bruisèd helmet and his bended sword
Before him through the city, he forbids it,
Being free from vainness and self-glorious pride;
Giving full trophy, signal, and ostent,
Quite from himself to God."

It is true, some of the King's acts of religion are in a style that is now out of date, and that was mostly out of date in England when the play was written: but this nowise detracts from their genuineness or from his integrity of heart in doing them. In the fifteenth century, piety and chivalry, which latter was then at its height, went hand in hand, forming a combination so foreign to our modes of thought, that we can hardly enter into it at all. That time is now generally, perhaps justly, regarded as an age of popular bigotry and of clerical simony; yet the Poet's hero is clearly no bigot, and is as clearly above the suspicion of unclean hands; and whatever may be thought of his religious modes, his Christian spirit is as lofty and pure as any age has witnessed in men of his place.

Much the same is to be said touching the civil administration of this King. It is easy for us to observe that, instead of making useless conquests in France, he had better stayed at home, and spent his care in furthering the arts of peace, and been content with giving his people the benefit of a just and unambitious government. But what we call a liberal, humane, and judicious policy of State was in no sort the thing for that time. All men's ideas of greatness and heroism ran in the channels of war and conquest: to make the people thrifty and happy by wise laws, was nowhere a mark of public honour and applause; and no nation was then held to have any rights that other nations were bound to respect. Nor, after all our fine words and high pretensions, are the nations of our time so clear in this regard, but that those older nations may still put in some claims to respect, and may even hold up their heads in our presence. It is enough that on all these points King Henry

the Fifth, as Shakespeare draws him, embodies whatever was noblest in the mind and heart of his time; though it seems hardly worth the while, even if it be true, to repeat the rather threadbare saying, that his faults were those of the age, while his virtues were those of the man. At all events, to insist, as some have done, on judging him by our standard of policy and wisdom, is too absurd or too wrong-headed to deserve any laboured exposure.

In respect of proper dramatic interest and effect, this play is far inferior to *King Henry the Fourth;* nor does it rank very high in the list of Shakespeare's achievements: but in respect of wisdom and poetry and eloquence it is among his very best. The Choruses are replete with the finest lyrical inspiration; and I know of nothing that surpasses them in vividness of imagery, or in potency to kindle and electrify the reader's imaginative forces. The King's speeches to his soldiers at Harfleur and to the Governor and citizens of that town, in Act iii.; his reflections on ceremony, and his speech to Westmoreland just before the battle of Agincourt, and Exeter's account of the deaths of York and Suffolk, all in Act iv.; and Burgundy's speech in favour of peace, in Act v.; all these may be cited as perfect models in their kind, at once eloquent and poetical in the highest degree. Campbell the poet aptly remarks of them, "It was said of Æschylus, that he composed his *Seven Chiefs against Thebes* under the inspiration of Mars himself. If Shakespeare's *Henry the Fifth* had been written for the Greeks, they would have paid him the same compliment." Nor must I omit to mention the Archbishop's illustration from the commonwealth of bees in Act i.; which has been justly noted as "full of the most exquisite imagery and music. The art employed in transforming the whole scene of the hive into a resemblance of humanity is a perfect study; every successive object, as it is brought forward, being invested with its characteristic attributes."

I have to confess that in one material respect, at least, this

play is not altogether such as I could wish. The French are palpably caricatured, and the caricature is not in a spirit of perfect fairness and candour: it savours too much of running an enemy down. The Poet's English prejudices, honest as they were, are something too strongly pronounced. Frederick Schlegel well observes that "the feeling by which Shakespeare seems to have been most connected with ordinary men is that of nationality"; but in this case his nationality is not so tolerant and generous as his other plays would lead us to expect; which imparts to the workmanship some want of the right artistic calmness and equipoise. It is true that in the hero's time the French people and government were in a most deplorable condition; the King insane, the Dauphin frivolous and vain, the nobility split into reckless and tearing factions, and the whole nation bordering upon a state of anarchy; insomuch that they may have well deserved the rough discipline Henry gave them; and perhaps nothing less would have sufficed to exorcise the evil spirit out of them, and put them in training for better days: but all this does not justify the braggart, mouth-stretching persiflage and insolence which the Poet ascribes to them. It is also true that in these points he renders them very much as he found them described in the *Chronicles*; but the regards of Art as well as of cool justice should have softened away those satirical, distorting, and vituperative lines of description: Shakespeare ought to have seen the French with his own eyes, and not with those of the old chroniclers. Gervinus suggests that a jealous patriotic feeling may have influenced the Poet in this matter. The great Henry the Fourth, probably the most accomplished statesman and wisest ruler of his time, was then on the throne of France. And the German critic thinks that Shakespeare may have had it in mind to dash the enthusiasm of his French contemporaries about their King, by showing an English Henry who was his equal in greatness and originality: but he rightly notes that the Poet's hero would have appeared still more noble, if his antagonists had been made to seem less despicable.

KING RICHARD THE THIRD.

SHAKESPEARE'S drama of KING RICHARD THE THIRD was preceded by at least two other plays on the same subject. The first of these was in Latin, written by Dr. Thomas Legge, Master of Caius College, Cambridge, and is said to have been acted at the University as early as 1579. Sir John Harrington, in his *Apology for Poetry*, 1591, speaks of this play as one that "would move Phalaris the tyrant, and terrify all tyrannous-minded men." There is no reason for thinking that Shakespeare ever saw it, or had any knowledge of it. The other was an English drama, printed in 1594, and called "The True Tragedy of Richard the Third: Wherein is shown the death of Edward the Fourth, with the smothering of the two young Princes in the Tower." We have no certain knowledge as to when this piece was written; though no one doubts that the writing was several years previous to 1594. Shakespeare's drama indicates no acquaintance with it except in two or three slight particulars; and even here the similarity infers no more knowledge than might well enough have been caught in the hearing. Other resemblances there are indeed, but only such as would naturally result from using a common authority. The older piece has little that can be deemed worthy of notice. The workmanship, though crude and clumsy enough, displays honesty of mind, and is comparatively free from inflation and bombast. The piece is written partly in prose and partly in heavy blank-verse, interspersed with pentameter couplets and rhyming stanzas, and with passages of fourteen-syllable lines. It may be well to add, for the curiosity of the thing, that, after Richard is killed, Report enters, and holds a dialogue with a Page, to give information of divers things not exhibited; after which, two Messengers come in, and unfold what is to be done and who is to reign, all the way from Richard to Queen Elizabeth, the whole winding up with an elaborate panegyric on the latter.

Shakespeare's drama was entered in the Stationers' register on the 20th of October, 1597, and was published the same year, but without the author's name. The play was reprinted in 1598, with "by William Shakespeare" added in the title-page. There was a third issue in 1602, a fourth in 1605, and a fifth in 1613; the last three all claiming to be "newly augmented," though in truth merely reprints of the former two. The play reappeared in the folio of 1623, with many slight alterations of text, with some omissions, and with a few additions, the latter extending in one place to fifty-five consecutive lines. Editors differ a good deal as to the comparative merits of the quarto and folio texts; though all admit that each makes some damaging omissions which the other must be drawn upon to supply. Mr. White leans decidedly to the folio; while Dyce, in his latest edition, prefers the quarto text, on the whole. For myself, I can hardly speak further than that my preference goes sometimes with the one, sometimes with the other. As the additions in the folio do not amount to a general enlargement of the piece, it does not well appear what ground or pretext the quarto of 1602 may have had for claiming to be "newly augmented." Perhaps it was but a publisher's trick, to induce a larger sale of the new edition. The play, however, has very marked diversities of style and workmanship, some parts relishing strongly of the Poet's earlier, others as strongly of his middle period; and I suspect the claim aforesaid may have referred, disingenuously indeed, to changes made in the piece before the issue of 1597.

The great popularity of this play is shown in the number of editions called for, wherein it surpasses any other of the Poet's dramas. For, besides the five quarto issues already mentioned, there were also three others in quarto, after the folio appeared; which proves that there was still a good demand for it in a separate form. It was also honoured beyond any of its fellows by the notice of contemporary writers. It is mentioned by Meres in his *Palladis Tamia*, 1598.

Next, we have a very remarkable allusion to it in a poem published in 1614, and entitled *The Ghost of Richard the Third.* The author of the poem gave only his initials, "C. B."; who he was is not positively known; some say Charles Best, others Christopher Brooke: but the strong commendatory verses upon him, which have come down to us from such pens as Ben Jonson, Chapman, and Wither, show him to have been a writer of no little distinction. The Ghost of Richard is made to speak as follows:

> "To him that imp'd my fame with Clio's quill,
> Whose magic rais'd me from Oblivion's den,
> That writ my story on the Muses' hill,
> And with my actions dignified his pen;
> He that from Helicon sends many a rill,
> Whose nectar'd veins are drunk by thirsty men;
> Crown'd be his style with fame, his head with bays,
> And none detract, but gratulate his praise."

Fuller, also, in his *Church History*, and Milton, in one of his political eruptions, refer to the play as well known; and Bishop Corbet, writing in 1617, gives a quaint description of his host at Bosworth, which is highly curious as witnessing both what an impression the play had made on the popular mind, and also how thoroughly the hero's part had become identified with Richard Burbadge, the original performer of it:

> "Mine host was full of ale and history;
> And in the morning, when he brought us nigh
> Where the two Roses join'd, you would suppose
> Chaucer ne'er made *The Romaunt of the Rose.*
> Hear him: *See you yon wood? there Richard lay*
> *With his whole army. Look the other way,*
> *And, lo! where Richmond in a bed of gorse*
> *Encamp'd himself all night, and all his force:*
> *Upon this hill they met.* — Why, he could tell
> The inch where Richmond stood, where Richard fell.
> Besides what of his knowledge he could say,
> He had authentic notice from the play;
> Which I might guess by's mustering up the ghosts,
> And policies not incident to hosts;

But chiefly by that one perspicuous thing,
Where he mistook a player for a king:
For, when he would have said, King Richard died,
And call'd, *A horse, a horse!* he Burbadge cried!"

As regards the date of the composition, the entry at the Stationers' is the only clear item of external evidence that we have. The internal evidence makes strongly for as early a date as 1593 or 1594. The general style, though showing a decided advance on that of the Second and Third Parts of *King Henry the Sixth*, is strictly continuous with it, while the history and characterization of the three plays so knit in together as to make them all of one piece and texture. And it is all but certain that the Poet's *King Henry the Sixth* was finished as early as 1592. In Clarence's account of his dream, and in Tyrrel's description of the murder of the young Princes, Shakespeare is out in his plenitude of poetical wealth; and the delineation of Richard is indeed a marvel of sustained vigour and versatile aptness: nevertheless the play, as a whole, evinces somewhat less maturity of power than *King Richard the Second:* in several cases there is great insubordination of the details to the general plan: the points of tragic stress are more frequent, and the dramatic motives more on the surface and more obvious, not to say obtrusive, than may well consist with the reason and law of Art: there is also too much piling-up of curses, or too much ringing of changes in imprecation; and in Richard's wooing of Lady Anne and of Queen Elizabeth there is an excess of dialogical epigram and antiphrastic point, with challenge and retort alternating through a prolonged series of stichometrical speeches: all which shows indeed a prodigious fertility of thought, but betrays withal a sort of mental incontinence, or a want of that self-restraining judgment which, in the Poet's later dramas, tempers all the parts and elements into artistic harmony and proportion. Then too the ethical idea or sense, instead of being duly poised or interfused with the dramatic current, comes

too near overriding and displacing it, — the pressure of a special purpose marring the organic symmetry of the work.

The close connection between this play and the Third Part of *King Henry the Sixth* is so evident as to leave no occasion for tracing it out in detail. At the opening of the one we have Richard flouting in soliloquy at the "stately triumphs" and "mirthful comic shows" with which, at the close of the other, King Edward had proposed to celebrate the final and full establishment of his cause. It was indeed fitting that, on Richard's first appearance as a dramatic hero, we should overhear him at his old practice of ruminating aloud, and thus familiarizing his thoughts with the villainies which he has it in purpose to enact. Everybody may well be presumed to know how Colley Cibber, being seized with a fit of progress, took upon him to reform Shakespeare's *King Richard the Third* into fitness for the stage. As the original play was too long for representation, his mode of retrenching it to the proper compass was, in part, by transporting into it a scene or two from the foregoing play. I notice the fact, now, merely as showing that he saw the perfect continuity of the two pieces; though, as would seem, he did not perceive the absurdity of thus setting the catastrophe of one at the opening of the other.

Historically considered, the play in hand embraces a period of something over fourteen years, namely, from the death of Henry, in May, 1471, to the fall of Richard, in August, 1485. Half of this period, however, is despatched in the first Act; the funeral of Henry, the marriage of Richard with Lady Anne, and the death of Clarence being represented as occurring all about the same time; whereas in fact they were separated by considerable intervals, the latter not taking place till February, 1478. And there is a similar abridgment, or rather suppression of time between the first Act and the second; as the latter opens with the sickness of King Edward, his seeming reconciliation of the peers, and

his death; all which occurred in April, 1483. Thenceforward the events of the drama are mainly disposed in the order of their actual occurrence; the drama being perhaps as true to the history as were practicable or desirable in a work so different in its nature and use.

This drawing together and massing of the scattered events is eminently judicious; for the plan of the drama required them to be used only as subservient to the hero's character; and it does not appear how the Poet could have ordered them better for developing, in the most forcible manner, his idea of that extraordinary man. So that the selection and grouping of the secondary incidents are regulated by the paramount law of the work; and they are certainly made to tell with masterly effect in furtherance of the author's purpose.

As to the moral complexion of Shakespeare's Richard, the incidents whereby his character in this respect transpires are nearly all taken from the historians, with only such heightening as it is the prerogative of poetry to lend, even when most tied to actual events. In the Poet's time, the prevailing ideas of Richard were derived from the history of his life and reign written by Sir Thomas More. More's character as a man is above all suspicion of malice or unfairness or rash judgment; while his clear legal mind and his thorough training in the law rendered him a master in the art of sifting and weighing evidence. His early life was passed in the household of Cardinal Morton, who figures as Bishop of Ely in the play; so that he had ready access to the best sources of information: and this, together with his "monumental probity" and his approved goodness of heart, stamps his work with as much credibility as can well attach to any record of contemporary events. His book was written in 1513, when he was thirty-three years old; and in speaking of those concerned in the murder of the Princes, he says, "Dighton yet walketh on alive, in good possibility to be hanged ere he die." The character of Richard as drawn by him, and as received in the Poet's time, is well shown in Bacon's *History of Henry the Seventh:*

"The body of Richard, after many indignities and reproaches, the *diriges* and obsequies of the common people towards tyrants, was obscurely buried; no man thinking any ignominy or contumely unworthy of him that had been the executioner of King Henry the Sixth, that innocent prince, with his own hands; the contriver of the death of the Duke of Clarence, his brother; the murderer of his two nephews, one of them his lawful king; and vehemently suspected to have been the impoisoner of his wife, thereby to make vacant his bed for a marriage within the degrees forbidden. And although he were a prince in military virtue approved, jealous of the honour of the English nation, and likewise a good law-maker, for the ease and solace of the common people; yet his cruelties and parricides, in the opinion of all men, weighed down his virtues and merits; and, in the opinion of wise men, even those virtues themselves were conceived to be rather feigned and affected things, to serve his ambition, than true qualities ingenerate in his judgment and nature."

Nevertheless much has since been written to explode the current history of Richard, and to lessen, if not remove, the abhorrence in which his memory had come to be held. The Poet has not been left without his share of criticism and censure for the alleged blackening of his dramatic hero. This attempt at reforming public opinion was led off by Sir George Buck, whose *History of Richard the Third* was published in 1646. The general drift of his book is well indicated by Fuller in his *Church History*, who is himself high authority on the matters in question: "He eveneth Richard's shoulders, smootheth his back, planeth his teeth, and maketh him in all points a comely and beautiful person. Nor stoppeth he here; but, proceeding from his naturals to his morals, maketh him as virtuous as handsome; concealing most, denying some, defending others, of his foulest facts, wherewith in all ages since he standeth charged on record. For mine own part, I confess it is no heresy to maintain a paradox in history; nor am I such an enemy to

wit as not to allow it leave harmlessly to disport itself for its own content, and the delight of others. But when men do it cordially, in sober sadness, to pervert people's judgments, and therein go against all received records, I say that singularity is the least fault that can be laid to such men's charges."

Something more than a century later, the work was resumed and carried on with much acuteness by Horace Walpole in his *Historic Doubts*. And several other writers have since put their hands to the same task. Still the old judgment seems likely to stand, the main substance thereof not having been much shaken yet. Dr. Lingard has carried to the subject his usual candour and research; and, after despatching the strong points urged on the other side, winds up his account of Richard thus: "Writers have indeed in modern times attempted to prove his innocence; but their arguments are rather ingenious than conclusive, and dwindle into groundless conjectures when confronted with the evidence which may be arrayed against them." The killing of the two Princes formed the backbone of the guilt laid at Richard's door. That they did actually disappear, is tolerably certain; that upon him fell whatever advantage could grow from their death, is equally so; and it is for those who deny the cause uniformly assigned at the time, and long after, for their disappearance, to tell us how and by whom they were put out of the way. And Sharon Turner, who may be justly ranked among the severest sifters of historic fictions and fables, is constrained to admit Richard's murder of his nephews; and so long as this blood-stain remains, the scouring of others, however it may diminish his crimes, will hardly lighten his criminality.

But even if Shakespeare's delineation were proved to be essentially untrue to Richard as he was in himself, this would not touch the standing of his work as a dramatic reproduction of historical matter. For the Poet's vindication on this score, it suffices that his Richard, so far at

least as regards the moral complexion of the man, is substantially the Richard of the chroniclers, and of all the historical authorities received and studied in his time. Besides, to satisfy the nice scruples and queries of historic doubters and dialecticians, is not a poet's business: his concern is with Truth in her operative form, not in her abstract essence; and to pursue the latter were to anatomize history, instead of representing it. Whether, then, Richard was in fact guilty of such and such crimes, matters little; it being enough that he was *generally believed to be so*, and that this belief was the mother-principle of those national events whereon the drama turns. That Richard was a prince of abundant head; that his government was in the main wise and just; that he was sober in counsel, brave in the field, and far-sighted in both; — all this only renders it the harder to account for that general desertion which left him almost naked to his foes, but by such a deep and wide-spread conviction of his wickedness as no puttings-forth of intellect could overcome. Thus his fall, so sudden and complete, was mainly in virtue of what he *was thought to be*. And forasmuch as the character generally set upon him at the time, if not the essential truth regarding him, was the stuff out of which were spun his overthrow, and the consequent opening of a new social and political era; such therefore was the only character that would cohere with the circumstances, so as to be capable of dramatic development.

More's history, as it is commonly called, was adopted by both Hall and Holinshed into their *Chronicles*. In that noble composition, the main features of the man are digested and drawn together as follows:

"Richard, the third son, was in wit and courage equal with either of them; little of stature, ill-featured of limbs, crook-backed, his left shoulder much higher than his right, hard-favoured of visage; malicious, wrathful, envious, and from afore his birth ever froward. Free he was called of

dispense, and somewhat above his power liberal: with large gifts he gat him unsteadfast friendship, for which he was fain to pill and spoil in other places, and gat him steadfast hatred. He was close and secret, a deep dissembler, lowly of countenance, arrogant of heart; outwardly companionable where he inwardly hated, not letting to kiss whom he thought to kill; despiteous and cruel, not for evil will always, but oftener for ambition, and for the surety or increase of his estate. His face was small, but such, that at the first aspect a man would judge it to savour of malice, fraud, and deceit. When he stood musing, he would bite and chaw his nether lip; as who said that his fierce nature in his cruel body always chafed, stirred, and was ever unquiet: besides that the dagger which he wore he would, when he studied, with his hand pluck up and down in the sheath to the midst, never drawing it fully out." Again the same writer notes him as being inordinately fond of splendid and showy dress; thus evincing an intense craving to be "looked on in the world," and to fascinate the eyes of men.

Shakespeare's Richard, morally speaking, is little else than this descriptive analysis reduced to dramatic life and expression; except, perhaps, that More regards him as a hypocrite by nature, and cruel from policy, whereas the Poet rather makes his cruelty innate, and his hypocrisy a politic art used in furtherance of his ambition.

In the present play, we have the working-out of the hero's character as already formed; the processes of its formation being set forth in the preceding plays of *King Henry the Sixth;* which is sufficient cause for adverting to a few points there delivered. And in this case, as in sundry others, the Poet suggests, at the very outset, the pivot on which the character mainly turns. When we first meet with Richard, Clifford taunts him:

> "Hence, heap of wrath, foul indigested lump,
> As crooked in thy manners as thy shape!"

And again in the same scene he is called "foul stigmatic"; because the stigma set on his person is both to others the

handiest theme of reproach, and also to himself the most annoying; like a huge boil on a man's face, which, for its unsightliness, his enemies see most, and, for its soreness, strike first. And Richard's personal deformity is regarded not only as the proper outshaping and physiognomy of a certain original malignity of soul, but also as aggravating that malignity in turn; his shape having grown ugly because his spirit was bad, and his spirit growing worse because of his ugly shape. For his ill-looks invite reproach, and reproach quickens his malice; and because men hate to look on him, therefore he craves all the more to be looked on; and, for the gaining of his wish in this point, he covets nothing so much as the being able through fear to compel that which inclination denies. Thus experience generates in him a most inordinate lust of power; while the circumstantial impossibility of coming at this save by crime puts him upon such a course of intellectual training and practice as may enable him to commit crimes, and still bar off the natural consequences.

Moreover his extreme vanity results in a morbid sensitiveness to any signs of neglect or scorn; and these being especially offensive to himself, he therefore has the greater delight in venting them on others: as taunts and scoffs are a form of power which he feels most keenly, he thence grows fond of using them as an apt form whereby to make his power felt. For even so bad men naturally covet to be wielding upon others the causes and instruments of their own sufferings. Hence the bitterly-sarcastic humour which Richard indulges so freely, and with such prodigious effect. Of course his sensitiveness is keenest touching the very particular wherein his vanity is most thwarted and wounded: he thinks of nothing so much as the ugliness that balks his desire, and resents nothing so sharply as the opinion or feeling it arrays against him. Accordingly his first and heaviest shots of sarcasm are at those who twit him on that score. So, in the scene where the Lancastrian Prince of Wales is killed, Richard seems unmoved till the Prince hits him in

that eye, when his wrath takes fire at once, and bursts out in the reply, "By Heaven, brat, I'll plague you for that word."

All which explains the cause of Richard's being so prone to "descant on his own deformity." His thoughts brood upon this, because it is the sorest spot in his condition; and he becomes intent on making it the source of a dearer gratification than any it deprives him of, — the consciousness of such mental powers as can bear him onward and upward in spite of those disadvantages. Thus his sense of personal disgrace begets a most hateful and malignant form of pride, — the pride of intellectual force and mastery. Hence he comes to glory in the matter of his shame, to exaggerate it, and hang over it, as serving to approve, to set off, and magnify his strength and fertility of wit; as who would say, Nature indeed made me the reproach and scorn of men, nevertheless I have made myself their wonder and applause; and though my body be such that men could not bear the sight of me, yet I have managed to charm their eyes.

In this way the man's galling wakefulness to his own unsightly shape festers and malignifies into a kind of self-pleasing virulence. Nor is this all. For, on much the same principle, he nurses to the highest pitch his consciousness also of moral deformities. So far from palliating his wickedness to himself, or skulking behind any subterfuges, or trying in any way to dodge the sense of it, he rather makes love to it, and exults in spreading it out and turning it round before his inward eye, and even stimulates his vision of it; as if he were so charmed with the sight that he could not bear to lose any moment of it. To succeed by wrong, to rise by crime, to grow great by inverting the moral order of things, is in his view the highest proof of genius and skill. So he cooks both his moral and personal ugliness into food of intellectual pride. The worse he sees himself to be, the higher he stands in his own esteem, because this argues in him the greater superiority to other men in force of mind. This aspect of the man is indeed startling, but I think it is

fully borne out by his soliloquies in the Third Part of *King Henry the Sixth;* especially that in Act iii., scene 2:

> "Well, say there is no kingdom, then, for Richard;
> What other pleasure can the world afford?
> I'll make my heaven in a lady's lap,
> And deck my body in gay ornaments,
> And witch sweet ladies with my words and looks.
> O miserable thought! and more unlikely
> Than to accomplish twenty golden crowns!
> Why, love forswore me in my mother's womb:
> And, for I should not deal in her soft laws,
> She did corrupt frail Nature with some bribe,
> To shrink mine arm up like a wither'd shrub;
> To make an envious mountain on my back,
> Where sits deformity to mock my body;
> To shape my legs of an unequal size;
> To disproportion me in every part.
> Then, since this earth affords no joy to me,
> But to command, to check, to o'erbear such
> As are of better person than myself,
> I'll make my heaven to dream upon the crown,
> And, whiles I live, t' account this world but Hell,
> Until my head, that this mis-shap'd trunk bears,
> Be round impalèd with a glorious crown.
> Why, I can smile, and murder whiles I smile;
> And cry *Content* to that which grieves my heart;
> And wet my cheeks with artificial tears,
> And frame my face to all occasions:
> I can add colours to the chameleon;
> Change shapes with Proteus for advantages;
> And set the murderous Machiavel to school."

So much for the Poet's Richard as his character is seen growing and taking shape. His innate malice has had fitting exercise and nurture amidst the rancours and fierceness of civil slaughter: by his immunities of rank and station, his native strength of will has been pampered into a towering audacity of thought and purpose: the constant presence and ever-shifting forms of danger have trained him to a most protean hypocrisy: he is a consummate master alike in the arts of dissembling and of simulation; can counterfeit brusqueness, meekness, innocence, humility, sor-

row, anger, indignation, artlessness, and piety; and can play the blusterer, the wag, the boon companion, the penitent, the lover, the devotee, the hot partisan, the hearty friend, the cool adviser, and the passionate avenger; each in turn, or several of them together, as the occasion prompts, or the end requires. But, whatever sentiment he is feigning, or whatever part he is playing, his biting, malicious wit is ever in action, as if this were an original impulse with him, and the natural pastime of his faculties. Many strong instances of this occur in the plays where he is growing, but nothing to what we have from the full-grown Richard in the play that bears his name. Any quotations in this kind would use up too much space; so I must rest with noting that we have a good sample in Act i., scene 3, where, coming abruptly into the presence of the Queen and her friends, he counterfeits passion as the language of grieved and injured virtue; and a still better one in Act iv., scene 2, where he plays off his caustic banter on "the deep-revolving witty Buckingham." In his pride of intellectual superiority, he looks with intense scorn on all in any sort touched with honesty; they are game to him; and it is his supreme delight to mock at such "simple gulls" as Clarence, Hastings, Stanley, Buckingham; and it is by his dry, stinging pungency of speech that he engineers his contempt of them to the spot. Those whom it is not in his power or his policy to kill he loves at least to torment with wounding flouts.

I have said that the moral complexion of Shakespeare's Richard was mainly taken from the historians. Intellectually, however, his proportions are drawn much beyond what the history accords him. I suppose there was very good reason for this. For, to have set forth such a moral physiognomy in dramatic form, with only his actual endowment of mind, would scarce consist with so much of pleasure in his gifts as was required to countervail the horror of his crimes. Such a measure of depravity, stripped of the disguise which it necessarily keeps up in real life, might

indeed be valuable as truth, but would hardly do as poetry. Which may aptly suggest the different laws of History and Art. Now the method of History is to please because it instructs; of Art, to instruct because it pleases. Such, at least, is the best way I can find of marking the difference in question. The forms of poetry are relished, not as being fitted to facts, but as they fit the mind. Nor does this infer any defect of real instructiveness in Art; for whatever pleasure springs in virtue of such correspondence with our better nature carries refreshment and invigoration in its touch.

Practically, no man ever understood this thing better than Shakespeare. Nor, perhaps, is his understanding thereof better shown anywhere than in Richard. The lines of his wickedness as traced in history are somewhat deepened in the play, and its features are charged with boisterous life; making, all together, a fearful picture, and such as, without counterpoising attractions, would be apt to shock and revolt the beholder. But his intellectuality is idealized so far and in such sort as to season the impression of his moral deformity with the largest and most various mental entertainment. If Richard is all villain, he is an all-accomplished one. And any painful sense of his villainy is spirited away by his thronging diversions of thought, his unflagging gayety of spirits, his prompt, piercing, versatile wit. Nay, his very crimes beget occasion for these enchantments, while every demand seems in effect to replenish his stock: and thus the hateful in his character is so compensated by the admirable, that we are more than reconciled to his company, though nowise reconciled to his crimes.

This point is well illustrated in Richard's wooing of Lady Anne, where the rays of his character are all gathered, as it were, into a focus. Now, whatever may have been the facts in the case, it is certain that Richard was at the time generally believed by the Lancastrians to have had a hand in killing both Henry the Sixth and Edward his son. It is

also certain that within two years after their death Richard was married to Edward's widow, who must in all reason be supposed to have shared in the common belief of her party. How that party felt on the subject well appears in that the late King was revered by them as a martyr, and his tomb hallowed as the abode of miraculous efficacies; for which cause Richard had his bones removed to a more secluded place. On Richard's part, the chief motive to the marriage probably was, that he might have a share in the immense estates of the lady's father, who was Richard Neville, the great Earl of Warwick, known in history as "the king-maker," and in Shakespeare as "the setter-up and puller-down of kings." For, as Clarence, having married the elder daughter, grasped at the whole; and as Richard proposed by taking the younger to acquire a part; hence arose the fierce strife between them, from which grew the general persuasion that Richard was somehow the cause of his brother's death. Perhaps, as indicating the manner and spirit of the contest, it should be mentioned that Clarence, to thwart Richard's purpose, at first had the lady concealed from his pursuit several months in the disguise of a cook-maid; and that when at last the former saw he could not prevent the marriage, he swore that the latter "should not part the livelihood with him."

So that the Poet is nowise answerable for this difficulty: it was in the history; and the best he could do was to furnish such a solution of it as would stand with the conditions of dramatic effect. Before solving the difficulty, however, he greatly augments it by suppression of time. Richard begins and finishes his courtship of the lady over the very coffin of the royal saint whose death *she* is mourning, and whom *he* is supposed to have murdered. Yet his triumph, such is the Poet's management, seems owing not so much to any special vice or defect in her as to his witchcraft of tongue and wit, so put in play as to disconcert all her powers of resistance. In a word, it is because the man is simply irresistible. And it should be remembered in her

behalf, that his art succeeds equally in beguiling King Edward, Clarence, Hastings, Buckingham, and others. His towering audacity, which, springing from entire confidence in his powers, prevails in part by the very boldness of its attempts; his flexibility and suppleness of thought, turning himself indifferently to all occasions, forms, and modes of address; his perfect self-possession and presence of mind, never at a loss for a shift, nor betrayed into a misstep, nor surprised into a pause; his wily dissimulation, and more wily frankness, silencing her charges by pleading guilty to them, parrying her blows by inviting them, disarming her hatred by owning its justice; and his simulating deep contrition for past misdeeds, and the inspiration of her virtue and beauty as the cause of it; — such are the parts of the sly, subtle, unfearing, remorseless Richard that are wrought out in his courtship of Lady Anne.

The scene is indeed far from being the best, or even among the best, in the play; but it combines a remarkable variety of characteristic points, and happily exemplifies the Poet's method of diverting off the offensiveness of Richard's acts by the entertainment of his gifts. In these respects, we have a repetition of the scene afterwards, when he in like manner triumphs, or seems to triumph, over the fears and scruples of Elizabeth. But indeed the Poet's work is shaped and ordered from the outset with a special view to the point in hand; the utmost care being taken, that in our first impression of the full-grown Richard his thought-swarming head may have the start of his bloody hand. Which order, by the way, is clean reversed in Cibber's patch-work preparation of the play; the murder of the sainted Henry being there foisted in at the opening, so that admiration of Richard's intellect is forestalled by abhorrence of his wickedness. Assuredly it is neither wise nor right thus to tamper with the Poet's workmanship. In the play as he made it, the opening soliloquy, so startling in its abruptness, and so crammed with poetry and thought, has the effect of duly pre-engaging our minds with the hero's active,

fertile, scheming brain: our impression is of one unrelenting indeed, and incapable of fear, but who looks well before he strikes, and who is at least as remarkable for his powers of mind as for his abuse of them. Thus, in the original drama, our feelings are from the first properly set and toned to the scope and measure of the terrible as distinguished from the horrible; the reverse of which takes place in the Cibberian profanation. And the organic law of the work plainly requires that some such initiative be given to the penetrating and imperturbable sagacity which presides over all the other elements of Richard's character, and everywhere pioneers to his purpose.

Richard's irresistible arts of insinuation, how he can at once, and almost in the same breath, plant terrors and sweeten them away, is well shown in the brief scene with Ratcliff and Catesby, when he is preparing to meet the invading Richmond:

> "*Rich.* Some light-foot friend post to the Duke of Norfolk: —
> Ratcliff, thyself, — or Catesby; where is he?
> *Cate.* Here, my good lord.
> *Rich.* Fly to the Duke. — [*To* RAT.] Post thou to Salisbury:
> When thou com'st thither, — [*To* CATE.] Dull, unmindful villain,
> Why stay'st thou here, and go'st not to the Duke?
> *Cate.* First, mighty liege, tell me your Highness' pleasure,
> What from your Grace I shall deliver to him.
> *Rich.* O, true, good Catesby: — bid him levy straight
> The greatest strength and power he can make,
> And meet me suddenly at Salisbury."

Here, by his bland apology implied in "O, true, good Catesby," which drops so easily that it seems to spring fresh from his heart, he instantly charms out the sting of his former words; and we feel that the man is knit closer to him than ever. Yet his kingly dignity is not a whit impaired, nay, is even heightened, by the act, partly from his graciousness of manner, and partly from his quick art in putting the apology under a sort of transparent disguise.

It should be observed that Richard, with all his inborn

malignity, still does not properly hate those whom he kills: they stand between him and his purpose; and he has "neither pity, love, nor fear," that he should blench or stick to hew them out of the way. His malice wantons in biting taunts and caustic irony; he revels in teasing and galling others with bitter mocks and jerks; but he is too self-repressive and too politic to let his malice run out in gratuitous cruelties. A reign of terror planted and upheld by a guillotine of malicious wit is as far as his ambition and sagacity will permit him to go in that direction. For Shakespeare could never have conceived of the English people as tolerating even for a day a reign of terror founded on a guillotine of steel. And Richard is prudent enough to restrain his innate virulence from attempting so suicidal a course as that. But he has at the same time a certain redundant, impulsive, restless activity of nature, so that he cannot hold still; and as his thought seizes with amazing quickness and sureness where and when and how to cut, so he is equally sudden and sure of hand. It is as if such an excess of life and energy had been rammed into his little body as to strain and bulge it out of shape.

I have observed that Richard is a villain with full consciousness; and that, instead of endeavouring in any way to hide from his crimes, he rather fondles and caresses them as food of intellectual pride. And such is Coleridge's view. "Pride of intellect," says he, "is the characteristic of Richard carried to the extent of even boasting to his own mind of his villainy. Shakespeare here develops, in a tone of sublime morality, the dreadful consequences of placing the moral in subordination to the mere intellectual being." In this respect, Richard transcends the Poet's other crime-heroes, Iago and Edmund, who, with all their steeping in hell-venom, are still unable to look their hellish purposes steadily in the face, and seek refuge in certain imaginary wrongs which it is the part of manhood to revenge either on particular persons or on society at large.

This feature of Richard transpires audibly, and with not a little of special emphasis, in his soliloquies, both those in the Third Part of *King Henry the Sixth*, and also those in the present play. It has been questioned, and is indeed fairly questionable, whether the delineation in this point does not overpass the natural limits of human wickedness. One of the authors of *Guesses at Truth* thinks the Poet "has somewhat exaggerated the diabolical element" in the speeches in question. "If," says he, "we compare the way in which Iago's plot is first sown, and springs up, and gradually grows and ripens in his brain, with Richard's downright enunciation of his projected series of crimes from the first, we may discern the contrast between the youth and the mature manhood of the mightiest intellect that ever lived upon earth." Again, after noting how Richard's sense of personal deformity acts as an irritant of his innate malice, the writer proceeds thus: "I cannot but think that Shakespeare would have made a somewhat different use even of this motive, if he had rewritten the play in the maturity of his intellect. Would not Richard then, like Edmund and Iago, have palliated and excused his crimes to himself, and sophisticated and played tricks with his conscience?" And the writer affirms withal, that "it is as contrary to nature for a man to anatomize his heart and soul thus, as it would be to make him dissect his own body."

Metaphors are rather ticklish things to reason with; and the sentence last quoted goes somewhat to discredit the writer's criticism in certain points which I am apt to think well taken. For in fact men often do practise a degree of self-anatomy in their mental and moral parts, such as were obviously impossible as regards their bodily structure. Now Richard as drawn by the Poet in action no less than in speech has a dare-devil intellectuality, in the strength of which, for aught I can see, he might inspect and scrutinize himself as minutely and as boldly as he would another person, or as another person would him. And why might he not, from the same cause, grow and harden into a habit of facing

his blackest purposes as unflinchingly as he does his unsightly person, and even of taking pleasure in over-painting their wickedness to himself, in order at once to stimulate and to gratify his lust of the brain? And does not his most distinctive feature, as compared with Iago and Edmund, stand mainly in this, that intellectual pride is in a more exclusive manner the constituent of his character? The critic, be it observed, specially faults certain of Richard's soliloquies, as if there were something exceptionally wrong in these; and the question with me is, whether these are not in perfect keeping with his character as transpiring in action throughout the play. For it is manifest that, in what he does, no less than in what he there says, his hypocrisy is without the least shade of self-delusion. The most constant, the most versatile, the most perfect of actors, he is never a whit taken in by his own acting: he has, in consummation, the art to conceal his art from others; and because this is what he chiefly glories in, therefore he takes care that it may not become in any degree a secret to himself. Moral obliquity so played as to pass for moral rectitude is to him the test and measure of intellectual strength and dexterity; for which cause he delights not only to practise it, but also to contemplate himself while practising it, and even while designing it. And herein he differs from all real-life actors, where it is hardly possible but that hypocrisy and self-deceit should slide into each other: hence it is that hypocrites are so apt to end by turning fanatics, and *vice versa*, as common observation testifies.

But this is making Richard out an improbable character, — a character running to a height of guilt where no man could sustain himself in being? Perhaps so. And my purpose is not so much to vindicate the soliloquies as to suggest whether the charge raised from them will not hold equally against the whole delineation. If I am right in thinking that the soliloquies strictly cohere with his general action, it follows that both are in fault, or neither: so that, if the Poet be there in error, he is at least consistently so. In-

stead, therefore, of rejecting the forecited criticism, I should rather incline to extend it over the substance and body of the play; in the very conception of which we seem to have somewhat of the mistake, so incident to youthful genius, of seeking for excellence rather by transcending Nature than by closing with her heartily, and going smoothly along with her.

It is plain that such a man as Richard must either cease to be himself, or else must be himself alone. Isolation, virtual or actual, is his vital air, the breath, the necessary condition of his life. One of his character, without his position, would have to *find* solitude; Richard, by his position, has the alternative of creating it: the former must be where none others are; the latter, where all others are in effect as if they were not. For society is in its nature a complexion of mutualities, and every rule pertaining to it works both ways: it is a partnership of individualities, some of them subordinate indeed, and some superior; but yet in such sort as to presuppose a net-work of ties running and recurring from each to each; so that no one can urge a right without inferring a duty, nor claim a bond without owning himself bound. But Richard's individuality can abide no partner, either as equal, or as second, or in any other degree. There is no *sharing* any thing with him, in however unequal portions; no acting *with* him, as original, self-moving agents, but only *from* him, as the objects and passive recipients of his activity. Such is the form and scope of his individuality, that other men's cannot stand in subordination to it, but must either crush it, or fly from it, or be absorbed into it; and the moment any one goes to acting otherwise than as a limb of his person, or an organ of his will, there is a virtual declaration of war between them, and the issue must hang on a trial of strength or of stratagem.

Hence there is, properly speaking, no interaction between Richard and the other persons of the drama. He is the all-in-all of the scene. And herein is this play chiefly distin-

guished from the others, and certainly, as a work of art, not distinguished for the better, that the entire action, in all its parts and stages, so far at least as it has any human origin and purpose, both springs from the hero as its source, and determines in him as its end. So that the drama is not so much a composition of co-operative characters, mutually developing and developed, as the prolonged yet hurried outcome of a single character, to which the other persons serve but as exponents and conductors; as if he were a volume of electricity disclosing himself by means of others, and quenching their active powers in the very process of doing so. The most considerable exception to this is Queen Margaret, whose individuality shoulders itself in face to face with Richard's; her passionate impulse wrestling evenly with his deliberate purpose, and her ferocious temper being provoked to larger and hotter eruptions by all attempts at restraint or intimidation. This, to be sure, is partly because she can *do* nothing; while at the same time her tongue is all the more eager and powerful to blast, forasmuch as she has no hands to strike.

The preceding remarks may go far to explain the great and lasting popularity of this play on the stage. There being no one to share with the hero in the action and interest of the piece, this renders it all the better for theatrical starring; for which cause most of the great actors have naturally been fond of appearing in it, and play-goers of seeing them in it. Besides, the hero, as before remarked, is himself essentially an actor, though an actor of many parts, sometimes acting one of them after another, and sometimes several of them together: and the fact that his character is much of it assumed, and carried through as a matter of art, probably makes it somewhat easier for another to assume. At all events, the difficulty, one would suppose, must be much less in proportion to the stage-effect than in reproducing the deep tragic passions of Lear and Othello, as these burst up from the original founts of nature.

Richard, however, is not all hypocrite: his courage and his self-control at least are genuine; nor is there any thing false or counterfeit in his acting of them. And his strength of will is exerted even more in repressing his own nature than in oppressing others. Here it is, perhaps, that we have the most admirable feature of the delineation. Such a vigour of self-command, the central force of all great characters, seldom fails to captivate the judgment, or to inspire something like respect; and, when carried to such a height as in Richard, it naturally touches common people with wonder and awe, as being wellnigh superhuman. In this respect, he strongly resembles Lady Macbeth, that he does absolute violence to his nature in outwrestling the powers of conscience. In his waking moments, he never betrays, except in one instance, any sense of guilt, any pangs of remorse; insomuch that he seems to have a hole in his head, where the moral faculties ought to be. But such a hole can nowise stand with judgment and true sagacity, which Richard certainly has in a high degree. And it is very much to the point that, as in Lady Macbeth, his strength of will is evidently overstrained in keeping down the insurgent moral forces of his being. But this part of his nature asserts itself in his sleep, when his powers of self-repression are suspended: then his involuntary forces rise in insurrection against the despotism of his voluntary. In his speech to the army near the close, he describes conscience as "a word that cowards use, devis'd at first to keep the strong in awe"; and this well shows how hard he strives to hide from others, and even from himself, the workings of that deity in his breast: but the horrid dreams which infest his pillow and plague his slumbers, and which are disclosed to us by Lady Anne, are a conclusive record of the torturing thoughts that have long been rending and harrowing his inner man in his active career, and of the extreme violence his nature has suffered from the tyranny of will in repressing all outward signs of the work going on within. That his conscience in sleep

should thus rouse itself and act the fury in his soul, to avenge the wrongs of his terrible self-despotism when awake, — this it is that, more than any thing else, vindicates his partnership in humanity, and keeps him within the circle of our human sympathies.

Richard's inexorable tenacity of purpose and his overbearing self-mastery have their strongest display in the catastrophe. He cannot indeed prolong his life; but he makes his death serve in the highest degree the end for which he has lived; dying in a perfect transport of heroism, insomuch that we may truly say, "nothing in his life became him like the leaving it." Nay, he may even be said to compel his own death, when a higher power than man's has cut off all other means of honour and triumph. Herein, too, the Poet followed the history: but in the prerogatives of his art he found out a way, which history knows not of, to satisfy the moral feelings; representing the hero as in Hands that can well afford to let him defy all the powers of human avengement. Inaccessible to earthly strokes, or accessible to them only in a way that adds to his earthly honour, yet this dreadful impunity is recompensed in the agonies of an embosomed hell; and our moral nature reaps a stern satisfaction in the retributions which are rendered vocal and articulate by the ghosts that are made to haunt his sleeping moments. For even so the Almighty sometimes chooses, apparently, to vindicate His law by taking the punishment directly and exclusively into His own hands. And, surely, His vengeance is never so awful as when subordinate ministries are thus dispensed with.

I here refer, of course, to what takes place the night before the battle of Bosworth-field. The matter was evidently suggested by the history, which gives it thus: "The fame went, that he had the same night a terrible dream; for it seemed to him, being asleep, that he did see divers images like terrible devils, which pulled and haled him, not suffering him to take any rest. The which strange vision not so suddenly strake his heart with fear, but it

stuffed his head with many busy and dreadful imaginations." The effect of this vision is best told by Richard himself, when he starts from his couch in an ecstasy of fright:

> "Give me another horse! — bind up my wounds! —
> Have mercy, Jesu! — Soft! I did but dream. —
> O coward conscience, how dost thou afflict me! —
> The lights burn blue. — It is now dead midnight.
> Cold fearful drops stand on my trembling flesh. —
> My conscience hath a thousand several tongues,
> And every tongue brings in a several tale,
> And every tale condemns me for a villain.
> I shall despair. — There is no creature loves me;
> And, if I die, no soul shall pity me.
> *Ratcliff.* [*Entering.*] My lord, —
> *Richard.* Who's there?
> *Rat.* My lord, 'tis I. The early village-cock
> Hath twice done salutation to the morn;
> Your friends are up, and buckle on their armour.
> *Rich.* O Ratcliff, I have dream'd a fearful dream!
> What thinkest thou — will our friends prove all true?
> *Rat.* No doubt, my lord.
> *Rich.* O Ratcliff, I fear, I fear!
> Methought the souls of all that I had murder'd
> Came to my tent; and every one did threat
> To-morrow's vengeance on the head of Richard.
> *Rat.* Nay, good my lord, be not afraid of shadows.
> *Rich.* By the apostle Paul, shadows to-night
> Have struck more terror to the heart of Richard
> Than can the substance of ten thousand soldiers
> Armèd in proof and led by shallow Richmond."

Thus the still small voice, which Richard so tyrannically strangles while consciousness is vigilant, takes its turn of tyranny with him when his other forces are in abeyance. And I suppose his intense, feverish activity of mind and body when awake springs in part from the gnawings of the worm: he endeavours, or rather is impelled, to stifle or lose the sense of guilt in a high-pressure stress and excitement of thought and work. For so the smothered pangs of remorse often act as potent stimulants or irritants of the intellect and will; the hell within burning the fiercer for

being repressed, and so heating the brain into restless, convulsive activity. In this way, the very conscience of crime may have the effect of plunging the subject into further crimes: Remorse

> "Works in his guilty hopes and selfish fears,
> And, while she scares him, goads him to his fate."

And it is through the secret working of this power that Henry's prophecy touching Richmond, and also the fortune-teller's prediction which made the hero start on seeing the castle at Exeter, and hearing it called Rougemont, stick so fast in his memory, and sit so heavy on his soul through the closing struggle. As Gervinus says, "he who in his realistic free-thinking was fain to deny all higher powers, and by his hypocrisy to deceive even Heaven itself, succumbs at last to their inevitable stroke."

The introduction of Margaret in this play has no formal warrant in history. After the battle of Tewksbury, May, 1471, she was confined in the Tower till 1475, when, being ransomed by her father, she went into France, and died there in 1482. So that the part she takes in these scenes is, throughout, a dramatic fiction. And a very judicious piece of fiction it is too. Nor is it without a basis of truth; for, though absent in person, she was notwithstanding present in spirit, and in the memory of her voice, which seemed to be still ringing in the ears of both friends and foes. Her character, too, like Richard's, has its growth and shaping in the preceding plays of *King Henry the Sixth;* which makes it needful to revert to certain matters there presented.

Henry the Fifth had made great conquests in France, and died in 1422, leaving the crown to his infant son, afterwards Henry the Sixth, who at the age of twenty-two was married to Margaret of Anjou. During his nonage, what with the rising spirit of France, and what with the fierce feuds that sprang up amongst the English leaders, the provinces in France were recovered one after another to the French

crown. The English people were vastly proud of those conquests, and were stung almost to madness at the loss of them. Hence grew the long series of civil wars known as "the Wars of the Roses." The great and fiery spirit of Margaret was present and active all through that conflict. The irritations caused by the losses in France are represented by Shakespeare as so many eggs of discord in the nest of English life, and Margaret as the hot-breasted fury that hatched them into effect; her haughty, vindictive temper, her indomitable energy, and fire-spouting tongue fitting her to be, as indeed she was, a constant provoker and stirrer-up of hatreds and strifes.

Much has been said by one critic and another about the Poet's Lancastrian prejudices as manifested in this series of plays. One may well be curious to know whether those prejudices are to be held responsible for the portrait he gives of Margaret, wherein we have, so to speak, an abbreviature and compendium of nearly all the worst vices of her time. The character, however lifelike and striking in its effect, is coloured much beyond what sober history warrants: though some of the main features are not without a basis of fact, still the composition and expression as a whole has hardly enough of historical truth to render it a caricature. A bold, ferocious, and tempestuous woman, void alike of delicacy, of dignity, and of discretion, all the bad passions out of which might be engendered the madness of civil war seem to flock and hover about her footsteps. Her speech and action, however, impart a wonderful vigour and lustihood to the scenes wherein she moves; and perhaps it was only by exaggerating her, or some other person, into a sort of representative character, that the springs and processes of that long national bear-fight could be developed in a poetical or dramatic form. Her penetrating intellect and unrestrainable volubility discourse forth the motives and principles of the combatant factions; while in her remorseless impiety and revengeful ferocity is impersonated, as it were, the very genius and spirit of the terrible con-

flict. So that we may regard her as, in some sort, an ideal concentration of that murderous ecstasy which seized upon the nation. And it should be observed withal, that popular tradition, sprung from the reports of her enemies, and cherished by patriotic feeling, had greatly overdrawn the wickedness of Margaret, to the end, apparently, that it might have something foreign whereon to father the evils resulting from her husband's weakness and the moral distemper of the times.

The dramatic character of Margaret, whether as transpiring at Court or in the field, is sustained at the same high pitch through all the plays wherein she figures. Afflictions do but open in her breast new founts of imbitterment: her speech is ever teeming with the sharp answer that engenders wrath; and out of every wound issues the virulence that is sure to provoke another blow. If any one thinks that her ferocity is strained up to a pitch incompatible with her sex, and unnecessary for the occasion; perhaps it will be deemed a sufficient answer, that the spirit of such a war could scarce be dramatically conveyed without the presence of a fury, and that the Furies have always been represented as females.

I will add a few words touching the reason which seems to have justified the Poet in carrying on the part of Margaret, against the literal truth of history, into the scenes of *King Richard the Third.*

Now it is considerable that in the earlier plays Richard is made several years older than he really was. Old enough, however, he was in fact, to have the spirit of the times thoroughly transfused into his character. There can be no doubt that the pungent seasoning sprinkled in here and there from the bad heart and busy brain of the precocious Richard is a material addition to those plays in an artistic point of view But there was, I think, good cause in the substantial truth of things why Richard should be there just as he is. In point of moral history, it was but right

to forecast the style of character which the proceedings then on foot were likely to generate and hand down to after-times. And as in the earlier plays Richard supplies such a forecast, so in the later play Margaret supplies a corresponding retrospect. She was continued on the scene, to the end, apparently, that the parties might have a terrible present remembrancer of their former deeds; just as the manhood of Richard had been anticipated for the purpose, as would seem, of forecasting the final issues from the earlier stages of that multitudinous tragedy. So that there appears to be some reason in the ways of Providence, as well as in the laws of Art, why Margaret should still be kept in presence, as the fitting counterpart of that terrible man, — so merry-hearted, subtle-witted, and bloody-handed, whose mental efficacy turns perjury, murder, and what is worse, if aught worse there be, to poetry, — as he grows on from youth to manhood, and from manhood to his end, at once the offspring and the avenger of civil butchery.

As for the part which Margaret takes in the scenes of *King Richard the Third*, I have but little to add respecting it. Her condition is vastly different indeed from what it was in the earlier plays, but her character remains the same. She is here stripped of arms and instruments, so that her thoughts can no longer work out in acts. But, for this very cause, her Amazonian energies concentrate themselves so much the more in her speech; and her eloquence, while retaining all its strength and fluency, burns the deeper, forasmuch as it is the only organ of her mind that she has left. In brief, she is still the same high-grown, wide-branching tree, now rendered leafless indeed, and therefore all the fitter for the blasts of heaven to howl and whistle through! Long suffering has deepened her fierceness into sublimity. At once vindictive and broken-hearted, her part runs into a most impressive blending of the terrible and the pathetic. Walpole, in his *Historic Doubts*, remarks that in this play the Poet "seems to deduce the woes of the House of York from the curses which Queen Margaret had vented against

them." Might it not as well be said that her woes are deduced from the curse formerly laid upon her by the Duke of York? I can perceive no deduction in either case: each seems but to have a foresight of future woe to the other, as the proper consequence of past or present crimes. The truth is, Margaret's curses do but proclaim those moral retributions of which God is the author, and Nature His minister; and perhaps the only way her former character could be carried on into these scenes was by making her seek indemnity for *her* woes in ringing changes upon the woes of others. She is a sort of wailing or ululating chorus to the thick-thronging butcheries and agonies that wind their course through the play. A great, brave, fearful woman indeed, made sacred by all the anguishes that a wife and a mother can know!

Of the other characters in this play probably little need be said. — Hastings and Buckingham neither get nor deserve any pity from us. They have done all they could to nurse and prepare the human tiger that finally hunts them to death. Their thorough steeping in the wickedness of the times, and their reckless participation, either by act or by sympathy, in Richard's slaughters, mark them out as worthy victims when, from motives no better than he is actuated by, they undertake to block the course which they have themselves exulted to see that living roll of hell-fire pursue.

Stanley gauges the hero rightly from the first, penetrates his closest designs, and then adroitly fathers the results of his own insight upon some current superstition of omens or dreams. Without sharing in any of Richard's crimes or defiling his hands at all with blood, he turns Richard's weapons against him, and fairly beats him at his own game. His relationship to Richmond naturally marks him out for suspicion: he forecasts this from afar, and with a kind of honest knavery so shapes his course that he can easily parry or dodge or quiet the suspicion when it comes. With clean purposes, he dissembles them as completely as Richard does

his foul ones. He is in secret correspondence with Richmond all along; yet carries it so, that no wind thereof gets abroad. His art takes on the garb of perfect frankness, candour, and simplicity, which is art indeed. He counsels Dorset to speed his flight to Richmond, and gives him letters; then goes straight to Richard, and tells him Dorset has fled. He is also the first to inform Richard that "Richmond is on the seas," and that "he makes for England, here to claim the crown." By this timely speaking of what is true, but what he would naturally be least expected to disclose, he makes a passage for the full-grown deceit which he is presently forced to use. But he justly holds it a work of honesty to deceive such an arch-deceiver in such a cause. And his patriotism and rectitude of purpose are amply shown in that, when the crisis comes, he stakes what is dearest in the world to him, for the deliverance of his country from the butchering tyrant. This was a good beginning for the noble and illustrious House of Stanley, which has, I believe, in all ages since stood true alike to loyalty and liberty.

The parts of Lady Anne, of Elizabeth, the Duchess of York, and the two young Princes, are skilfully managed so as to diversify and relieve what would else be a prolonged monotony of atrocious wickedness and intellectual circus-riding. I say relieve, for the change from the society of such consummate hypocrisies and villainies to that of heart-rending sorrow is a relief: nay, it is almost a positive happiness thus to escape now and then from the doers of wrong, and breathe awhile with the sufferers of wrong.

Lady Anne's seeming levity in yielding to the serpent flatteries of the wooing homicide is readily forgiven in the sore burden of grief which it entails upon her, in her subdued gentleness to other destined victims, and in the sad resignation with which she forecasts the bitterness of her brief future. Her nature is felt to be all too soft to stand

against the crafty and merciless tormentor into whose hand she has given herself; and she seems

> "Like a poor bird entangled in a snare,
> Whose heart still flutters, though her wings forbear
> To stir in useless struggle."

Elizabeth is prudent, motherly, and pitiful, withal by no means lacking in strength and spirit. Stanley, Margaret, and the Duchess excepted, she is the only person in the play who reads correctly the hero's character. From the slaughter of her kindred at Pomfret, her instinctive feminine sagacity gathers at once the whole scheme of what is coming, and anticipates the utter ruin of her House. But she is so benetted round with intriguing arts, and, what is still worse, so beset with the friendly assurances of minds less penetrating than hers, that all her defences prove of no avail in the chief point. It was both wise and kind in the Poet to represent her voice as so untuned to the language of imprecation, that she has to call on one so eloquent in curses as Margaret to do her cursing for her. In the scene where Richard wooes so persistently for her daughter's hand, it appears something uncertain whether she is really beguiled and won by his wizard rhetoric, or whether she only temporizes, and feigns a reluctant acquiescence, and so at last fairly outwits him. Most critics, I believe, have taken the former view; but I am far from seeing it so: for her daughter's hand is firmly pledged to Richmond already, and she is in the whole secret of the plot for seating him on the throne. So I take it as an instance of that profound yet innocent and almost unconscious guile which women are apt to use in defence of those they love, and which so often proves an overmatch for all the resources of deliberate craft.

The two Princes are charmingly discriminated, and the delineation of them, though compressed into a few brief speeches, is an exquisite piece of work. The elder is inquisitive, thoughtful, cautious in his words, hardly knowing

whether to fear his uncle or not, and, with a fine instinctive tact, veiling his doubt under a pregnant equivoque. The younger is pert, precocious, and clever, and prattles out his keen childish wit, in perfect freedom from apprehension, and quite innocent of the stings it carries. Their guileless intelligence and sweet trustfulness of disposition make a capital foil to the Satanic subtlety and virulent intellectuality of Richard.

This drama has, in my judgment, many and great faults, some of which I have noted already. Certain scenes and passages excepted, the workmanship in all its parts, in language, structure of the verse, and quality of tone, is greatly below what we find in the Poet's later plays. In many places, there is an overstudied roundness of diction and regularity of movement; therewithal the persons often deliver themselves too much in the style of set speeches, and rather as authors striving for effect than as men and women stirred by the real passions and interests of life; there is at times an artificial and bookish tang in the dialogue, and many strains of elaborate jingle made by using the same word in different senses; — all smacking as if the Poet wrote more from what he had read in books, or heard at the theatre, than from what his most prying, quick, and apprehensive ear had caught of the unwritten drama of actual and possible men. In illustration of the point, I may aptly refer to the hero's soliloquy when he starts so wildly from his "fearful dream"; some parts of which are in or near the Poet's best style, others in his worst. The good parts I have quoted already, and those are indeed good enough: the rest is made up of forced conceits and affectations, such as Nature utterly refuses to own; albeit the plays and novels of that time were generally full of them. Here is a brief specimen:

> "What do I fear? myself? there's none else by:
> Richard loves Richard; that is, I am I.
> Is there a murderer here? No; — yes, I am:

> Then fly. What, from myself? Great reason why, —
> Lest I revenge myself upon myself.
> Alack, I love myself. Wherefore? for any good
> That I myself have done unto myself?
> O, no! alas, I rather hate myself
> For hateful deeds committed by myself."

It is hard to believe that Shakespeare could have written this at any time of his life, or that the speaker was meant to be in earnest in twisting such riddles; but he was. Some have indeed claimed to see a reason for the thing in the speaker's state of mind; but this view is, to my thinking, quite upset by the better parts of the same speech.

On the whole, then, I should say that in this piece the author is struggling and vibrating between the native impulses of his genius and the force of custom and example; or like one just passing out of youth into manhood, and fluctuating between the two. For even so, in some of his plays, the Poet seems going more by fashion than by inspiration, or consulting now what is within him, now what is around him. And I think it stands to reason, that he could not have reached his own high ways of art without first practising in the ways already open and approved. Of course, as experience gradually developed his native strength, and at the same time taught him what this was sufficient for, he would naturally throw aside more and more the aids of custom and precedent; since these would come to be felt as incumbrances in proportion as he grew able to do better without them.

And this would naturally hold much more in his efforts at tragedy than at comedy. For the elements of comedy, besides being more light and wieldy in themselves, had been playing freely about his boyhood, and mingling in his earliest observation of human life and character: so that here he would be apt to cast himself more quickly and unreservedly upon Nature, as he had been used to meet and converse with her. Tragedy, on the other hand, must in reason have been to him a much more artificial thing; and

he would needs require both a larger measure and a stronger faculty of observation and experience, before he could find the elements of it in Nature, and become able to digest and modulate them into the many-toned yet severe and nicely-balanced harmony of Dramatic Art. Is it not clear, then, that in proportion as he lacked the power to grasp and wield the forces of tragedy, in his first efforts in that kind, he would be mainly governed by what stood before him, and that the adventitious helps and influences of the time would be prominently reproduced in his work? Therefore it is, no doubt, that his earlier comedies are so much more Shakespearian in style and spirit and characterization than his tragedies of the same period. For can it be questioned that such a man so circumstanced would both *find himself* and make others find him sooner in comedy than in tragedy? At all events, it is certain that his earlier labours in both kinds were, to a great extent, specimens of imitation; though, indeed, of imitation surpassing its models. It seems in fact to have been through the process of imitation that his character and idiom got worked out into free and self-reliant action.

So that, as I have elsewhere remarked, it is a great mistake to regard Shakespeare as one with whom the ordinary laws and methods of intellectual growth and virtue had little or nothing to do. He must indeed have been a prodigious infant; yet an infant he unquestionably was; and had to proceed by the usual paths from infancy to manhood, however unusual may have been the case and speed of his passage. Dowered perhaps with such a portion of genius as hath fallen to no other mortal, still his powers had to struggle through the common infirmities and incumbrances of our nature. For, assuredly, his mighty mind was not born full-grown and ready-furnished for the course and service of Truth, but had to creep, totter, and prattle; much study, observation, experience, in a word, a long, severe *tentative* process being required to insinew and discipline and regulate his genius into power.

KING HENRY THE EIGHTH.

KING HENRY THE EIGHTH was undoubtedly among the latest of the Poet's writing: Mr. Grant White thinks it was the very last; nor am I aware of any thing that can be soundly alleged against that opinion. The play was never printed till in the folio of 1623. It is first heard of in connection with the burning of the Globe theatre, on the 29th of June, 1613: at least I am fully satisfied that this is the piece which was on the stage at that time. Howes the chronicler, recording the event some time after it occurred, speaks of "the house being filled with people to behold the play of *Henry the Eighth*." And we have a letter from Thomas Lorkin to Sir Thomas Puckering, dated "London, this last of June," with the following: "No longer since than yesterday, while Burbage's company were acting at the Globe the play of *Henry the Eighth*, and there shooting off certain chambers in way of triumph, the fire catched, and fastened upon the thatch of the house, and there burned so furiously, as it consumed the whole house." But the most particular account is in a letter from Sir Henry Wotton to his nephew, dated July 2, 1613: "Now, to let matters of State sleep, I will entertain you at the present with what happened this week at the Bankside. The King's Players had a new play called *All is True*, representing some principal pieces in the reign of Henry the Eighth, which was set forth with many extraordinary circumstances of pomp and majesty. Now King Henry making a masque at the Cardinal Wolsey's house, and certain cannons being shot off at his entry, some of the paper or other stuff wherewith one of them was stopped did light on the thatch, where, being thought at first but an idle smoke, and their eyes being more attentive to the show, it kindled inwardly, and ran round like a train, consuming within less than an hour the whole house to the very ground. This was the fatal period of that virtuous fabric; wherein yet nothing did perish but wood and straw, and a few forsaken cloaks."

Some of the circumstances here specified clearly point to the play which has come down to us as Shakespeare's. Sir Henry, to be sure, speaks of the piece by the title "*All is True*"; but the other two authorities describe it as "the play of *Henry the Eighth*." And it is worth noting that Lorkin, in stating the cause of the fire, uses the very word, *chambers*, which is used in the original stage-direction of the play. So that the discrepancies in regard to the name infer no more than that the play then had a double title, as many other plays also had. And the name used by Sir Henry is unequivocally referred to in the Prologue, the whole argument of which turns upon the quality of the piece as being *true*. Then too the whole play, as regards the kind of interest sought to be awakened, is strictly correspondent with what the Prologue claims in that behalf: a scrupulous fidelity to Fact is manifestly the law of the piece, as if the author had here undertaken to set forth a drama made up emphatically of "chosen truth," insomuch that it might justly bear the significant title *All is True*.

The piece in performance at the burning of the Globe theatre is described by Wotton as *a new play;* and it will hardly be questioned that he knew well what he was saying. The internal evidence of the piece itself all draws to the same conclusion as to the time of writing. In that part of Cranmer's prophecy which refers to King James, we have these lines:

> "Wherever the bright Sun of heaven shall shine,
> The honour and the greatness of his name
> Shall be, and make new nations: he shall flourish,
> And, like a mountain cedar, reach his branches
> To all the plains about him."

On a portrait of King James once owned by Lord Bacon, the King is styled *Imperii Atlantici Conditor*. And all agree that the first allusion in the lines just quoted is to the founding of the colony in Virginia, the charter of which was renewed in 1612, the chief settlement named Jamestown,

and a lottery opened in aid of the colonists. The last part of the quotation probably refers to the marriage of the King's daughter Elizabeth with the Elector Palatine, which took place in February, 1613. The marriage was a theme of intense joy and high anticipations to the English people, as it seemed to knit them up with the Protestant interest of Germany; anticipations destined indeed to a sad reverse in the calamities that fell upon the Elector's House. Concurrent with these notes of seeming allusion to passing events, are the style, language, and versification; in which respects it is hardly distinguishable from *Coriolanus* and the other plays known to have been of the Poet's latest period.

All which considered, I am quite at a loss why so many editors and critics should have questioned whether Shakespeare's drama were the one in performance at the burning of the Globe theatre. They have done this partly under the assumption that Shakespeare's play could not have been *new* at that time. But I cannot find such assumption at all sustained by any arguments they have produced. It is true, a piece described as "The Interlude of King Henry the Eighth" was entered at the Stationers' in February, 1605. There is, however, no good reason for ascribing this piece to Shakespeare: on the contrary, there is ample reason for supposing it to have been a play by Samuel Rowley, entitled "When you see me you know me, or the famous chronicle history of King Henry the Eighth," and published in 1605.

Some, again, urge that Shakespeare's play must have been written before the death of Elizabeth, which was in March, 1603. This is done on the ground that the Poet would not have been likely to glorify her reign so largely after her death. And because it is still less likely that during her life he would have glorified so highly the reign of her successor, therefore resort is had to the theory, that in 1613 the play was revived under a new title, which led Wotton to think it a new play, and that the Prologue was then written, and the passage referring to James interpolated. But all this is sheer conjecture, and is directly refuted by the Prologue

itself, which clearly supposes the forthcoming play to be then in performance for the first time, and the nature and plan of it to be wholly unknown to the audience: to tell the people they were not about to hear

> "A noise of targets, or to see a fellow
> In a long motley coat guarded with yellow,"

had been flat impertinence in case of a play that had been on the stage several years before. As to the passage touching James, I can perceive no such signs as have been alleged of its being an after-insertion: the awkwardness of connection, which has been affirmed as betraying a second hand or a second time, is altogether imaginary: the lines knit in as smoothly and as logically with the context, both before and after, as any other lines in the speech.

Nor can I discover any indications of the play's having been written with any special thought of pleasing Elizabeth. The design, so far as she is concerned, seems much rather to have been to please the people, by whom she was all-beloved during her life, and, if possible, still more so when, after the lapse of a few years, her prudence, her courage, and her magnanimity save where her female jealousies were touched, had been set off by the blunders and infirmities of her successor. For it is well known that the popular feeling ran back so strongly to her government, that James had no way but to fall in with the current, notwithstanding the strong causes which he had, both public and personal, to execrate her memory. The play has an evident making in with this feeling, unsolicitous, generally, of what would have been likely to make in, and sometimes boldly adventurous of what would have been sure to make out, with the object of it. Such an appreciative delineation of the meek and honourable sorrows of Catharine, so nobly proud, yet in that pride so gentle and true-hearted; her dignified submission, wherein her rights as a woman and a wife are firmly and sweetly asserted, yet the sharpest eye cannot detect the least swerving from duty; her brave and eloquent sympathy with

the plundered people, pleading their cause in the face of royal and reverend rapacity, this too with an energetic simplicity which even the witchcraft of Wolsey's tongue cannot sophisticate; and all this set in open contrast with the worldly-minded levity, and the equivocal or at least qualified virtue, of her rival, and with the headstrong, high-handed, conscience-shamming selfishness of the King; — surely the Poet must have known a great deal less, or a great deal more, than anybody else, of the haughty daughter of that rival and that King, to have thought of pleasing her by such a representation.

The historical matter of the play, so far as relates to the fall of Wolsey and the divorce of Catharine, was derived, originally, from George Cavendish, who was gentleman-usher to the great Cardinal, and himself an eye-witness of much that he describes. His *Life of Master Wolsey* is among the best specimens extant of the older English literature; the narrative being set forth in a clear, simple, manly eloquence, which the Poet, in some of his finest passages, almost literally transcribed. Whether the book had been printed in Shakespeare's time, is uncertain; but so much of it as fell within the plot of the drama had been embodied in the chronicles of Holinshed and Stowe. In the fifth Act, the incidents, and in many cases the very words, are taken from Fox the martyrologist, whose *Acts and Monuments of the Church*, first published in 1563, had grown to be a very popular book in the Poet's time.

The "fierce vanities" displayed in the Field of the Cloth of Gold, with an account of which the play opens, occurred in June, 1520, and the death of Buckingham in May, 1521. The court assembled for the divorce began its work on the 18th of June, 1529, and was dissolved, without concluding any thing, on the 23d of July. On the 17th of October following, Wolsey resigned the Great Seal, and died on the 29th of November, 1530. In July, 1531, Catharine withdrew from the Court, and took up her abode at Ampthill. Long

before this time, the King had been trying to persuade Anne Boleyn, one of the Queen's Maids of Honour, to be a sort of left-hand wife to him; but an older sister of hers had already held that place, and had enough of it: so she was resolved to be his right-hand wife or none at all; and, as the Queen would not recede from her appeal to the Pope, Anne still held off till she should have more assurance of the divorce being carried through. In September, 1532, she was made Marchioness of Pembroke, and was privately married to the King on the 25th of January, 1533. Cranmer became Archbishop of Canterbury the next March, and went directly about the business of the divorce, which was finished on the 24th of May. This was followed, in June, by the coronation of the new Queen, and in September by the birth and christening of the Princess Elizabeth. Soon after the divorce, Catharine removed to Kimbolton, where, in the course of the next year, 1534, she had to digest the slaughter of her steadfast friends, Fisher and More; as the peculiar temper of the King, being then without the eloquence of the great Cardinal or the virtue of the good Queen to assuage it, could no longer be withheld from such repasts of blood. Catharine died on the 8th of January, 1536, which was some two years and four months after the birth of Elizabeth. The play, however, reverses the order of these two events. As for the matter of Cranmer and the Privy Council, in Act v., this did not take place till 1544, more than eleven years after the event with which the play closes.

Dr. Johnson gave it as his opinion that the Prologue and Epilogue of this play were not written by Shakespeare. And I believe all the critics who have since given any special heed to the matter have joined in that opinion. I have not for many years had the slightest doubt on the subject. And I am equally clear in the same opinion touching the Epilogues to *The Tempest* and *King Henry the Fourth*, and the Chorus to the fourth Act of *The Winter's Tale*. Nor, indeed, does it seem possible that any one having a right taste

for Shakespeare should judge otherwise, after comparing those pieces with the Induction to the Second Part of *Henry the Fourth*, and the Choruses in *King Henry the Fifth*; all which ring the true Shakespearian gold for workmanship in that kind. It was very common for the dramatic writers of the time to have such trimmings of their plays done by some friend. Who wrote the Prologue and Epilogue to *Henry the Eighth* has been somewhat in question. The well-known intimacy and friendship between Jonson and Shakespeare have naturally drawn men's thoughts to honest Ben as the author of them: but, as the style answers equally well to the motions of another hand; and as we have unquestionable marks of another hand in the body of the play; a conjectural ascription of the matter to Jonson is not properly in order.

It is now, I think, as good as settled that this play was the joint production of Shakespeare and John Fletcher; somewhat more than half of it belonging to the latter. Dr. Johnson had the sagacity to observe that the genius of Shakespeare comes in and goes out with Catharine; and that the rest of the play might be easily conceived and easily written. But this germ of criticism did not grow to any tangible results till our own day. As far back, however, as 1850, Mr. James Spedding, a critic of approved perspicacity and judgment, published an article in *The Gentleman's Magazine*, discoursing the theme with lucid statement and cogent argument; and all the more satisfactory, that it lands in definite and well-braced conclusions. On the appearance of this article, Mr. Samuel Hickson, another discriminating and judicious critic, put forth a brief paper in *Notes and Queries*, expressing an entire concurrence with Mr. Spedding, and also saying that he had reached the same conclusion three or four years before; this too without having any communication with him, or any knowledge of him, even of his name; but that the want of a favourable opportunity had kept him from making his thoughts known. Nor was this a mere general concurrence; it was an entire agreement

in the details, and extending even to the assignment of scenes and parts of scenes to their respective authors. Still more recently, Mr. F. G. Fleay has brought his metrical tests and his figures to bear upon the question; and the result is a full confirmation both of the general and the particular conclusions reached by the two other gentlemen.

Of course the evidence on which this judgment proceeds is altogether internal, as the play has come down to us without any outside tokens or suggestions of another hand than Shakespeare's in the making of it. And the most striking and available parts of that evidence, though not the strongest, have reference to the qualities of style and versification. But Fletcher's peculiarities in this point are so strongly marked; rather say, he has an habitual mannerism of diction and metre so pronounced; that no one thoroughly at home in his acknowledged workmanship can easily fail to taste his presence in whatever he wrote: and, as certain portions of the play in hand have the full measure of his idiom in those respects, so it is nowise strange that several critics, once started on the track, should all tie up in the same result.

For my own part, I have slowly and reluctantly grown, or been drawn, into the same upshot with the writers named, and am now thoroughly satisfied that the conclusion they have reached is substantially right. The details of this conclusion are as follows: — That the first and second scenes of Act i. are Shakespeare's; also the third and fourth scenes of Act ii.; also about three sevenths of the second scene in Act iii., down to the King's parting from Wolsey with the words, "and then to breakfast with what appetite you have"; also the first two scenes of Act v.: and that all the rest of the play is Fletcher's; namely, the third and fourth scenes of Act i., the first and second of Act ii., the first, and about four sevenths of the second in Act iii., the whole of Act iv., and third and fourth of Act v., also the Prologue and Epilogue. Mr. Fleay makes the whole number of blank-verse lines in the play to be 2613, of which 1467 are Fletcher's, thus leaving only 1146 to Shakespeare.

From the forecited distribution I see no reason to dissent, except that, as Mr. Spedding admits, some of the portions assigned to Fletcher have traces of a superior workman. In particular, the latter part of the second scene in Act iii., all after the *exit* of the King, seems to me a mixture of Fletcher and Shakespeare: though the Fletcher element preponderates, still I feel some decided workings of the master-hand. The same, though in a somewhat less degree, of the coronation scene, the first in Act iv. Certainly, if Fletcher wrote the whole of these, he must have been, for the time, surprised out of himself, and lifted quite above his ordinary plane; even the best that he does elsewhere giving no promise of such touches as we find here. On the other hand, I doubt whether the first two scenes of Act v. be pure Shakespeare: at all events, they seem by no means equal to his other portions of the play. And, as the two authors probably wrote in conjunction, it might well be that some whole scenes were done by each, while in others their hands worked together, or the one revised and finished what the other had first written; thus giving us choice bits of Shakespearian gold mingled with the Fletcherian silver.

Mr. Spedding's essay is so fine a piece of criticism in itself, so calm and just in temper, and withal cuts so near the heart of the subject, that I cannot well resist the impulse to reproduce a considerable portion of it. After a clear statement of his conclusion, together with the grounds of it, he proceeds as follows:

"The opening of the play — the conversation between Buckingham, Norfolk, and Abergavenny — seemed to have the full stamp of Shakespeare, in his latest manner: the same close-packed expression; the same life, and reality, and freshness; the same rapid and abrupt turnings of thought, so quick that language can hardly follow fast enough; the same impatient activity of intellect and fancy, which, having once disclosed an idea, cannot wait to work it orderly out; the same daring confidence in the resources of language, which plunges headlong into a sentence without knowing how it is to come forth; the same careless

metre which disdains to produce its harmonious effects by the ordinary devices, yet is evidently subject to a master of harmony; the same entire freedom from book-language and commonplace; all the qualities, in short, which distinguish the magical hand which has never yet been successfully imitated.

"In the scene in the Council-chamber which follows, where the characters of Catharine and Wolsey are brought out, I found the same characteristics equally strong.

"But the instant I entered upon the third scene, in which the Lord Chamberlain, Lord Sands, and Lovell converse, I was conscious of a total change. I felt as if I had passed suddenly out of the language of nature into the language of the stage, or of some conventional mode of conversation. The structure of the verse was quite different, and full of mannerism. The expression became suddenly diffuse and languid. The wit wanted mirth and character. And all this was equally true of the supper-scene which closes the first Act.

"The second Act brought me back to the tragic vein, but it was not the tragic vein of Shakespeare. When I compared the eager, impetuous, and fiery language of Buckingham in the first Act with the languid and measured cadences of his farewell speech, I felt that the difference was too great to be accounted for by the mere change of situation, without supposing also a change of writers. The presence of death produces great changes in men, but no such change as we have here.

"When, in like manner, I compared the Henry and Wolsey of the scene which follows with the Henry and Wolsey of the Council-chamber, I perceived a difference scarcely less striking. The dialogue, through the whole scene, sounded still slow and artificial.

"The next scene brought another sudden change. And, as in passing from the second to the third scene of the first Act, I had seemed to be passing all at once out of the language of nature into that of convention; so, in passing from the second to the third scene of the second Act, (in which Anne Boleyn appears, I may say for the first time, for in the supper-scene she was merely a conventional Court lady without any character at all,) I seemed to pass not less suddenly from convention back again into nature. And, when I considered that this short and otherwise insignificant passage contains all that we ever see of Anne, and yet how clearly the character comes out, how very a woman she is, and

yet how distinguishable from any other individual woman, I had no difficulty in acknowledging that the sketch came from the same hand which drew Perdita.

"Next follows the famous trial-scene. And here I could as little doubt that I recognized the same hand to which we owe the trial of Hermione. When I compared the language of Henry and of Wolsey throughout this scene to the end of the Act, with their language in the Council-chamber, (Act i. scene 2,) I found that it corresponded in all essential features: when I compared it with their language in the second scene of the second Act, I perceived that it was altogether different. Catharine, also, as she appears in this scene, was exactly the same person as she was in the Council-chamber; but, when I went on to the first scene of the third Act, which represents her interview with Wolsey and Campeius, I found her as much changed as Buckingham was after his sentence, though without any alteration of circumstances to account for an alteration of temper. Indeed the whole of this scene seemed to have all the peculiarities of Fletcher, both in conception, language, and versification, without a single feature that reminded me of Shakespeare; and, since in both passages the true narrative of Cavendish is followed minutely and carefully, and both are therefore copies from the same original and in the same style of art, it was the more easy to compare them with each other.

"In the next scene, (Act iii. scene 2,) I seemed again to get out of Fletcher into Shakespeare; though probably not into Shakespeare pure; a scene by another hand perhaps, which Shakespeare had only remodelled, or a scene by Shakespeare which another hand had worked upon to make it fit the place. The speeches interchanged between Henry and Wolsey seemed to be entirely Shakespeare's; but, in the altercation between Wolsey and the lords which follows, I could recognize little or nothing of his peculiar manner, while many passages were strongly marked with the favourite Fletcherian cadence: and as for the famous "Farewell, a long farewell," &c., though associated by means of *Enfield's Speaker* with my earliest notions of Shakespeare, it appeared (now that my mind was opened to entertain the doubt) to belong entirely and unquestionably to Fletcher.

"Of the fourth Act I did not so well know what to think. For the most part it seemed to bear evidence of a more vigorous hand

than Fletcher's, with less of mannerism, especially in the description of the coronation, and the character of Wolsey; and yet it had not to my mind the freshness and originality of Shakespeare. It was pathetic and graceful, but one could see how it was done. Catharine's last speeches, however, smacked strongly again of Fletcher. And, all together, it seemed to me that, if this Act had occurred in one of the plays written by Beaumont and Fletcher in conjunction, it would probably have been thought that both of them had a hand in it.

"The first scene of the fifth Act, and the opening of the second, I should again have confidently ascribed to Shakespeare, were it not that the whole passage seemed so strangely out of place. I could only suppose that the task of putting the whole together had been left to an inferior hand; in which case I should consider this to be a genuine piece of Shakespeare's work, spoiled by being introduced where it has no business. In the execution of the christening-scene, on the other hand, (in spite again of the earliest and strongest associations,) I could see no evidence of Shakespeare's hand at all; while in point of *design* it seemed inconceivable that a judgment like his could have been content with a conclusion so little in harmony with the prevailing spirit and purpose of the piece."

As regards the point of diction and metre, the argument turns very much upon the use of verses with a redundant syllable at the end, or what are commonly called lines with double endings, but what I sometimes designate as lines with amphibractic endings. This, at all events, is the handiest, and perhaps the most telling, item to be urged in illustration of the point. And here it will not be out of place to observe that Shakespeare's regular verse is the iambic pentameter. This, however, he continually diversifies with metrical irregularities, introducing trochees, spondees, anapests, dibrachs, tribrachs, and sometimes dactyls, in various parts of his lines. But his most frequent irregularity is by ending his verses with amphibrachs; and this occurs much oftener in his later plays than in his earlier; and in some of his plays, as in the Shakespeare portions of the one now in hand, we have about one third of the lines

ending with amphibrachs. The purpose of this is, to prevent or avoid monotony; just as great composers enrich and deepen their harmonies by a skilful use of discords. Now Fletcher's use of this irregularity is far more frequent than Shakespeare's; commonly not less than two thirds of his lines, and often a larger proportion, having amphibractic endings. So excessive is this usage with him, that, besides rendering the movement of his verse comparatively feeble and languid, it becomes a very emphatic mannerism: in fact, it just works the irregularity itself into a new monotony, and a monotony of the most soporific kind. For nothing has so much the effect of a wearisome sameness as a continual or too frequent recurrence of the same variation: even the studied and uniform regularity, or what Cowper terms "the creamy smoothness," of Pope's versification is less monotonous to the ear, than such an over-use of one and the same mode of diversity. And this, together with certain other traits of style and diction not easy to describe, imparts to Fletcher's verse a very peculiar and rather heavy swing and cadence, often amounting to downright sing-song and humdrum. Many times, in reading him, I have, almost before I knew it, caught my thoughts drowsing off into a half-somnolent state, from this constant and uniform oscillation, so to speak, of his language and metre. Vastly different is all this in Shakespeare; whose metrical irregularities are always so ordered as to have the effect of jogging the attention into alertness and keeping it freshly awake.

To make the point clear to the apprehension of average readers, I will next produce several of Fletcher's best and most characteristic passages; enough to give a full and fair taste of his habitual manner. The first is from *The Knight of Malta*, ii. 5, where Oriana, the heroine, being falsely accused of crime, and sentenced to die, unless a champion appear and vindicate her honour in single combat, makes the following speech as she goes up to the scaffold:

> "Thus I ascend; nearer, I hope, to Heaven!
> Nor do I fear to tread this dark black mansion,

The image of my grave: each foot we move
Goes to it still, each hour we leave behind us
Knolls sadly toward it. — My noble brother, —
For yet mine innocence dares call you so, —
And you the friends to virtue, that come hither,
The chorus to this tragic scene, behold me,
Behold me with your justice, not with pity,
(My cause was ne'er so poor to ask compassion,)
Behold me in this spotless white I wear,
The emblem of my life, of all my actions;
So ye shall find my story, though I perish.
Behold me in my sex: I am no soldier;
Tender and full of fears our blushing sex is,
Unharden'd with relentless thoughts; unhatcht
With blood and bloody practice: alas, we tremble
But when an angry dream afflicts our fancies;
Die with a tale well told. Had I been practised,
And known the way of mischief, travell'd in it,
And given my blood and honour up to reach it;
Forgot religion, and the line I sprung on;
O Heaven! I had been fit then for Thy justice,
And then in black, as dark as Hell, I had howl'd here.
Last, in your own opinions weigh mine innocence:
Amongst ye I was planted from an infant,
(Would then, if Heaven had so been pleased, I had perish'd!)
Grew up, and goodly, ready to bear fruit,
The honourable fruit of marriage:
And am I blasted in my bud with treason?
Boldly and basely of my fair name ravish'd,
And hither brought to find my rest in ruin?
But He that knows all, He that rights all wrongs,
And in His time restores, knows me! — I've spoken."

The next is the main part of two speeches made by Cæsar, with Pompey's lifeless head before him, in *The False One*, ii. 1:

"Thou glory of the world once, now the pity,
Thou awe of nations, wherefore didst thou fall thus?
What poor fate follow'd thee, and pluck'd thee on,
To trust thy sacred life to an Egyptian?
The light and life of Rome to a blind stranger,
That honourable war ne'er taught a nobleness,

Nor worthy circumstance shew'd what a man was?
That never heard thy name sung but in banquets,
And loose lascivious pleasures? to a boy,
That had no faith to comprehend thy greatness,
No study of thy life, to know thy goodness?
And leave thy nation, nay, thy noble friend,
Leave him distrusted, that in tears falls with thee,
In soft relenting tears? Hear me, great Pompey;
If thy great spirit can hear, I must task thee!
Thou hast most unnobly robb'd me of my victory,
My love and mercy."

"*Ptol.* Hear me, great Cæsar!
Cæsar. I have heard too much:
And study not with smooth shows to invade
My noble mind, as you have done my conquest.
You're poor and open: I must tell you roundly,
That man that could not recompense the benefits,
The great and bounteous services, of Pompey,
Can never dote upon the name of Cæsar.
Though I had hated Pompey, and allow'd his ruin,
I gave you no commission to perform it:
Hasty to please in blood are seldom trusty;
And, but I stand environ'd with my victories,
My fortune never failing to befriend me,
My noble strengths and friends about my person,
I durst not try you, nor expect a courtesy
Above the pious love you shew'd to Pompey.
You've found me merciful in arguing with ye:
Swords, hangmen, fires, destructions of all natures,
Demolishments of kingdoms, and whole ruins,
Are wont to be my orators. Turn to tears,
You wretched and poor seeds of sun-burnt Egypt;
And, now you've found the nature of a conqueror
That you cannot decline with all your flatteries;
That, where the day gives light, will be himself still;
Know how to meet his worth with humane courtesies!
Go, and embalm those bones of that great soldier;
Howl round about his pile, fling on your spices,
Make a Sabæan bed, and place this phœnix
Where the hot Sun may emulate his virtues,
And draw another Pompey from his ashes,
Divinely great, and fix him 'mongst the Worthies!"

The following is one of Lisander's speeches in *The Lover's Progress*, ii. 3 :

"Can Heaven be pleased with these things?
To see two hearts that have been twined together,
Married in friendship, to the world two wonders,
Of one growth, one nourishment, one health,
Thus mortally divorced for one weak woman?
Can Love be pleased? Love is a gentle spirit;
The wind that blows the April flowers not softer:
She's drawn with doves, to show her peacefulness:
Lions and bloody pards are Mars's servants.
Would you serve Love? do it with humbleness,
Without a noise, with still prayers and soft murmurs:
Upon her altars offer your obedience,
And not your brawls; she's won with tears, not terrors:
That fire you kindle to her deity,
Is only grateful when it's blown with sighs,
And holy incense flung with white-hand innocence:
You wound her now; you are too superstitious:
No sacrifice of blood or death she longs for."

I add another characteristic strain from the same play, iv. 4 :

"*Lisander.* I' the depth of meditation, do you not
Sometimes think of Olinda?
Lidian. I endeavour
To raze her from my memory, as I wish
You would do the whole sex; for know, Lisander,
The greatest curse brave man can labour under
Is the strong witchcraft of a woman's eyes.
Where I find men, I preach this doctrine to 'em:
As you're a scholar, knowledge make your mistress,
The hidden beauties of the Heavens your study;
There shall you find fit wonder for your faith,
And for your eye inimitable objects:
As you're a profess'd soldier, court your honour;
Though she be stern, she's honest, a brave mistress!
The greater danger you oppose to win her,
She shows the sweeter, and rewards the nobler.
Woman's best loves to hers mere shadows be;
For after death she weds your memory."

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In the foregoing extracts we have 114 complete lines, of which 79 end with amphibrachs, thus leaving 35 with iambic endings; a proportion of something more than two to one. Cranmer's long speech at the close of the play in hand contains 49 lines, of which 34 have amphibractic endings, and 15 iambic; also a proportion of somewhat more than two to one. The average proportion in Buckingham's three speeches on going to his execution is about the same; and so through all the Fletcherian portions of the play. Besides this most obvious feature, Fletcher has another trick of mannerism, frequently repeating a thought, or fraction of a thought, with some variation of language; which imparts a very un-Shakespearian diffuseness to his style, as of an author much more fluent and fertile in words than in matter. This trait also is repeatedly exemplified in the forecited passages: so that, by comparing those passages with the parts of the play ascribed to Fletcher, any one having an eye and an ear for such things can easily identify the two as proceeding from one and the same source.

But the play has another very striking and decided characteristic which I was for a long time quite unable to account for. The structure and ordering of the piece as a whole is very unlike Shakespeare's usual workmanship, especially that of his closing period. Coleridge aptly notes it as "a sort of historical masque or show-play"; for so, to be sure, it has several masque-like scenes, that interrupt the proper dramatic continuity; as the supper-scene at Wolsey's house, i. 4, and the scene of the coronation, iv. 1. In other words, the piece is far from evincing great skill or judgment in the high point of dramatic architecture. Judged by the standard of Shakespeare's other plays, it is by no means a well organized specimen. We can trace in it no presiding idea, no governing thought. Though some of the parts are noble in themselves, still they have no clear principle of concert and unity, no right artistic centre: they rather give the impression of having been put together arbitrarily, and not under any organic law. The various threads of interest do not

pull together, nor show any clear intelligence of each other; the whole thus seeming rather a mechanical juxtaposition of parts than a vital concrescence. In short, the current both of dramatic and of historic interest is repeatedly broken and disordered by misplaced and premature semi-catastrophes, which do not help each other at all; instead of flowing on with continuous and increasing volume to the one proper catastrophe. The matter is well stated by Gervinus: "The interest first clings to Buckingham and his designs against Wolsey, but with the second Act he leaves the stage; then Wolsey draws the attention increasingly, and he too disappears in the third Act; meanwhile our sympathies are drawn more and more to Catharine, who also leaves the stage in the fourth Act: then, after being thus shattered through four Acts by circumstances of a tragic character, we have the fifth Act closing with a merry festivity, for which we are not prepared, and crowning the King's base passion with victory, in which we take no warm interest."

By way of accounting for all this, I probably cannot do better than to quote again from Mr. Spedding, who discourses the point as follows:

"It was not unusual in those days, when a play was wanted in a hurry, to set two or three or even four hands at work upon it; and the occasion of the Princess Elizabeth's marriage may very likely have suggested the production of a play representing the marriage of Henry VIII. and Anne Boleyn. Such an occasion would sufficiently account for the determination to treat the subject not tragically; the necessity for producing it immediately might lead to the employment of several hands; and thence would follow inequality of workmanship and imperfect adaptation of the several parts to each other. But this would not explain the incoherency and inconsistency of the main design. Had Shakespeare been employed to make a design for a play which was to end with the happy marriage of Henry and Anne Boleyn, we may be sure that he would not have occupied us through the first four Acts with a tragic and absorbing interest in the decline and death of Queen Catharine, and through half the fifth with a quarrel between Cranmer and Gardiner, in which we have no interest.

"On the other hand, since it is by Shakespeare that all the principal matters and characters are *introduced*, it is not likely that the general design of the piece would be laid out by another. I should rather conjecture that he had conceived the idea of a great historical drama on the subject of Henry VIII. which would have included the divorce of Catharine, the fall of Wolsey, the rise of Cranmer, the coronation of Anne Boleyn, and the final separation of the English from the Romish Church, which, being the one great historical event of the reign, would naturally be chosen as the focus of poetic interest; that he had proceeded in the execution of this idea as far perhaps as the third Act, which might have included the establishment of Cranmer in the seat of highest ecclesiastical authority; when, finding that his fellows of the Globe were in distress for a new play to honour the marriage of the Lady Elizabeth with, he thought that his half-finished work might help them, and accordingly handed them his manuscript to make what they could of it; that they put it into the hands of Fletcher, (already in high repute as a popular and expeditious playwright,) who, finding the original design not very suitable to the occasion and utterly beyond his capacity, expanded the three Acts into five, by interspersing scenes of show and magnificence, and passages of description, and long poetical conversations, in which his strength lay; dropped all allusion to the great ecclesiastical revolution, which he could not manage and for which he had no materials supplied him; converted what should have been the middle into the end; and so turned out a splendid 'historical masque, or shew-play,' which was no doubt very popular then, as it has been ever since."

It is a question of no little interest, how far and in what sort the authors of this play stand committed to the Reformation; if at all, whether more as a religious or as a national movement. They certainly show a good mind towards Cranmer; but nothing can be justly argued from this, for they show the same quite as much towards Catharine; and the King's real motives for putting her away are made plain enough. There are however several expressions, especially that in Cranmer's prophecy touching Elizabeth, — "In her days God shall be truly known," — which indicate pretty clearly how the authors regarded the great ecclesiastical

question of the time; though it may be fairly urged that in all these cases they do but make the persons speak characteristically, and without practising any ventriloquism about them. Not that I have any doubt as to their being what would now be called Protestants. That they were truly such, is quite evident, I think, in the general complexion of the piece, which, by the way, is the only one of Shakespeare's plays where this issue enters into the structure and life of the work. Surely no men otherwise minded would have selected and ordered the materials of a drama so clearly with a view to celebrate Elizabeth's reign, all the main features of which were identified with the Protestant interest by foes as well as friends. But, whether the authors were made such more by religious or by national sympathies, is another question, and one not to be decided so easily. For the honour and independence of England were then so bound up with that cause, that Shakespeare's sound English heart, and the strong current of patriotic sentiment that flowed through his veins, were enough of themselves to secure it his cordial adhesion. That there was, practically, no breath for the stout nationality of old England but in the atmosphere of the Reformation, left no choice to such a thoroughgoing Englishman as he everywhere approves himself. All which sets off the more clearly his judicial calmness in giving to the characters severally their due, and in letting them speak out freely and in their own way the mind that is within them. That, in his view, they could best serve his ends by being true to themselves, is sufficient proof that his ends were right.

The social and civil climate of England as shown in this piece is very different from that in the other plays of the historic series. A new order of things has evidently sprung up and got firm roothold in the land. Nor have we far to seek for the causes of this. All through the time of Henry the Eighth, owing to the long frenzy of civil slaughter which had lately possessed the nation, the English poeple were in

nervous dread of a disputed succession. In the course of that frenzy, the old overgrown nobility became greatly reduced in numbers and crippled in strength, so as to be no longer an effective check upon the constitutional head of the State. The natural effect was to draw the throne into much closer sympathy with the people at large: the King had to throw himself more and more upon the commons; which of course brought on a proportionable growth of this interest. So, in these scenes, we find the commons highly charged with a sense of their rising strength, and the rulers, from the King downwards, quailing before their determined voice. The best chance of power and consequence is felt to be by "gaining the love of the commonalty." On the other hand, the people, being thus for the first time brought into direct intercourse with the throne, and being elated with the novelty of having the King with them, become highly enthusiastic in his cause; they warm up intensely towards his person, and are indeed the most obsequious of all orders to any stretches of prerogative that he may venture in their names; the growth of his power being felt by them as the growth of their own. So that this state of things had the effect for a while of greatly enhancing the power of the Crown. Henry the Eighth was almost if not altogether autocratic in his rule. Both he and Elizabeth made themselves directly responsible to the people, and the people in turn made them all but irresponsible.

Nor do the signs of a general transition-process stop here. Corresponding changes in ideas and manners are going on. Under the long madness of domestic butchery, the rage for war had in all classes thoroughly spent itself. Military skill and service is no longer the chief, much less the only path to preferment and power. Another order of abilities has come forward, and made its way to the highest places of honour and trust. The custom is gradually working in of governing more by wisdom, and less by force. The arts of war are yielding the chief seat to the arts of peace: learning, eloquence, civic accomplishment, are disputing precedence with hereditary claims: even the highest noblemen are get-

ting ambitious of shining in the new walks of honour, and of planting other titles to nobility than birth and family and warlike renown; insomuch that the princely Buckingham, graced as he is with civil abilities, and highly as he values himself upon them, complains that "a beggar's book outworths a noble's blood."

This new order of things has its crowning exponent in Wolsey, whose towering greatness in the State is because he really leads the age in the faculties and resources of solid statesmanship. But his rapid growth of power and honour not only turns his own head, but provokes the envy and hatred of the old nobility, whose untamed pride of blood naturally resents his ostentatious pride of merit. And he has withal in large measure the overgrown upstart's arrogance towards both the class from which he sprang and the class into which he has made his way. Next to Wolsey, the King himself, besides having strong natural parts, was the most accomplished man in the same arts, and probably the ablest statesman that England had in his time. But his nature was essentially coarse, hard, and sinister; his refinement was but skin-deep, and without any roothold in his heart; and, from the causes already noted, his native infirmities got pampered into the ruffianism, at once cold and boisterous, which won him the popular designation of "bluff King Hal," and which is artfully disguised indeed by the authors, yet not so but that we feel its presence more than enough.

I have already observed how the interest of this play is broken and scattered by incoherences of design and execution. The interest, however, of the several portions is deep and genuine while it lasts; at least, till we come to the fifth Act. We are carried through a series of sudden and most afflicting reverses. One after another, the mighty are broken and the lofty laid low; their prosperity being strained to a high pitch, as if on purpose to deepen their plunge, just when they have reached the summit with their hearts built up

and settled to the height of their rising, and when the revolving wheel of time seems fast locked with themselves at the top.

First, we have Buckingham in the full-blown pride of rank and talents. He is wise in counsel, rich in culture and accomplishment, of captivating deportment, learned and eloquent in discourse. A too self-flattering sense of his strength and importance has made him insolent and presumptuous; and his self-control has failed from the very elevation that rendered it most needful to him. In case of Henry's dying without issue, he was the next male heir to the throne in the Beaufort branch of the Lancastrian House. So he plays with aspiring thoughts, and practises the arts of popularity, and calls in the aid of fortune-tellers to feed his ambitious schemes, and at the same time by his haughty bearing stings the haughtiness of Wolsey, and sets that wary, piercing eye in quest of matter against him. Thus he puts forth those leaves of hope which, as they express the worst parts of himself, naturally provoke the worst parts of others, and so invite danger while blinding him to its approach; till at length all things within and around are made ripe for his upsetting and ruin; and, while he is exultingly spreading snares for the Cardinal, he is himself caught and crushed with the strong toils of that master-hand.

Next, we have the patient and saintly Catharine sitting in state with the King, all that she would ask being granted ere she asks it; sharing half his power, and appearing most worthy of it when most free to use it. She sees blessings flowing from her hand to the people, and the honour and happiness of the nation reviving as she pleads for them; and her state seems secure, because it stands on nothing but virtue, and she seeks nothing but the good of all within her reach. Yet even now the King is cherishing in secret the passion that has already supplanted her from his heart, and his sinister craft is plotting the means of divorcing her from his side, and at the same time weaving about her such a net of intrigue as may render her very strength and beauty of

character powerless in her behalf; so that before she feels the meditated wrong all chance of redress is foreclosed, and she is left with no defence but the sacredness of her sorrows.

Then we have the overgreat Cardinal, who, in his plenitude of inward forces, has cut his way and carried himself upward over whatever offered to stop him. He walks most securely when dangers are thickest about him; and is sure to make his purpose so long as there is any thing to hinder him; because he has the gift of turning all that would thwart him into the ministry of a new strength. His cunning hand quietly gathers in the elements of power, because he best knows how to use it, and wherein the secret of it lies: he has the King for his pupil and dependant because his magic of tongue is never at a loss for just the right word at just the right time. By his wisdom and eloquence he assuages Henry's lawless tempers, and charms his headstrong caprice into prudent and prosperous courses, and thus gets the keeping of his will. That he can always sweeten the devil out of the King and hold him to the right, is hardly to be supposed; but even when such is not the case he still holds the King to him by his executive ability and art in putting the wrong smoothly through. His very power, however, of rising against all opposers serves, apparently, but to aggravate and assure his fall when there is no further height for him to climb; and at last, through his own mere oversight and oblivion, he loses all, from his having no more to gain.

Yet in all these cases, inasmuch as the persons have their strength inherent, and not adventitious, therefore they carry it with them in their reverses; or rather, in seeming to lose it, they augment it. For it is then seen, as it could not be before, that the greatness which was in their circumstances served to obscure that which was in themselves. Buckingham is something more and better than the gifted and accomplished nobleman, when he stands before us unpropped and simply as "poor Edward Bohun"; his innate nobility being then set free, and his mind falling back upon its naked self for the making good his title to respect. Wolsey, also,

towers far above the all-performing and all-powerful Cardinal and Chancellor who "bore his blushing honours thick upon him," when, stripped of every thing that fortune and favour can give or take away, he bestows his great mind in parting counsel upon Cromwell; when he comes, "an old man broken with the storms of State," to beg "a little earth for charity"; and when he has really "felt himself, and found the blessedness of being little."

Nor is the change in our feelings towards these men, after their fall, merely an effect passing within ourselves: it proceeds in part upon a real disclosure of something in them that was before hidden beneath the superinducings of place and circumstance. Their nobler and better qualities shine out afresh when they are brought low, so that from their fall we learn the true causes of their rising. And because this real and true exaltation springs up naturally in consequence of their fall, therefore it is that from their ruins the authors build "such noble scenes as draw the eye to flow."

Wolsey is indeed a superb delineation, strong, subtile, comprehensive, and profound. All the way from his magnificent arrogance at the start to his penetrating and persuasive wisdom on quitting the scene, the space is rich with deep and telling lines of character. The corrupting influences of place and power have stimulated the worser elements of his nature into an usurped predominance: pride, ambition, duplicity, insolence, vindictiveness, a passion for intriguing and circumventing arts, a wilful and elaborate stifling of conscience and pity, confidence in his potency of speech making him reckless of truth and contemptuous of simplicity and purity, — these are the faults, all of gigantic stature, that have got possession of him. When the reverse, so sudden and decisive, overtakes him, its first effect is to render him more truthful. In the great scene, iii. 2, where Norfolk, Suffolk, and Surrey so remorselessly hunt him down with charges and reproaches, his conscience is quickly stung into resurgence; with clear eye he begins to see, in their

malice and their ill-mannered exultation at his fall, a reflection of his own moral features, and with keen pangs of remorse he forthwith goes to searching and hating and despising in himself the things that show so hateful and so mean in his enemies; and their envenomed taunts have the effect rather of composing his mind than of irritating it. To be sure, he at first stings back again; but in his upworkings of anger his long-dormant honesty is soon awakened, and this presently calms him.

His repentance, withal, is hearty and genuine, and not a mere exercise in self-cozenage, or a fit of self-commiseration: as he takes all his healthy vigour and clearness of understanding into the process, so he is carried through a real renovation of the heart and rejuvenescence of the soul: his former sensibility of principle, his early faith in truth and right, which had been drugged to sleep with the high-wines of state and pomp, revive; and, with the solid sense and refreshment of having triumphed over his faults and put down his baser self, his self-respect returns; and he now feels himself stronger with the world against him than he had been with the world at his beck. As the first practical fruit of all this, and the best proof of his earnestness in it, he turns away his selfishness, and becomes generous, preferring another's welfare and happiness to his own: for so he bids Cromwell fly from him, and bestow his services where the benefits thereof will fall to the doer; whereas a selfish man in such a case would most of all repine at losing the aid and comfort of a cherished and trusted servant. Finally, in his parting counsel to Cromwell, there is a home-felt calmness and energy of truth, such as assures us that the noble thoughts and purposes, the deep religious wisdom, which launched him, and for some time kept with him, in his great career, have been reborn within him, and are far sweeter to his taste than they were before he had made trial of their contraries. No man could speak such words as the following, unless his whole soul were in them:

"Cromwell, I charge thee, fling away ambition:
By that sin fell the angels; how can man, then,
The image of his Maker, hope to win by't?
Love thyself last; cherish those hearts that hate thee:
Corruption wins not more than honesty.
Still in thy right hand carry gentle peace,
To silence envious tongues. Be just, and fear not:
Let all the ends thou aim'st at be thy country's,
Thy God's, and truth's: then if thou fall'st, O Cromwell,
Thou fall'st a blessèd martyr."

The delineation of Catharine differs from the two foregoing, in that she maintains the same simple, austere, and solid sweetness of mind and manners through all the changes of fortune. Yet she, too, rises by her humiliation, and is made perfect by suffering, if not in herself, at least to us: for it gives her full sway over those deeper sympathies which are necessary to a just appreciation of the profound and venerable beauty of her character. She is mild, meek, and discreet; and the harmonious blending of these qualities with her high Castilian pride gives her a very peculiar charm. Therewithal she is plain in mind and person; has neither great nor brilliant parts; and of this she is fully aware, for she knows herself thoroughly: but she is nevertheless truly great, — and this is the one truth about her which she does not know, — from the symmetry and composure wherein all the elements of her being stand and move together: so that she presents a remarkable instance of greatness in the whole, with the absence of it in the parts. How clear and exact her judgment and discrimination! yet we scarce know whence it comes, or how. From the first broaching of the divorce, she knows the thing is all a foregone conclusion with the King; she is also in full possession of the secret why it is so: she feels her utter helplessness, being, as she is, in a land of strangers, with a capricious tyrant for the party against her, so that no man will dare to befriend her cause with honest heartiness; that no trial there to be had can be any thing but a mockery of

justice, for the sole purpose will be to find arguments in support of what is predetermined, and to set a face of truth on a body of falsehood: she has no way therefore but to take care of her own cause; her only help lies in being true to herself; and indeed the modest, gentle, dignified wisdom with which she schools herself to meet the crisis is worth a thousand-fold more than all the defences that any learning and ingenuity and eloquence could frame in her behalf.

Her power over our better feelings is in no small degree owing to the impression we take, that she sees through her husband perfectly, yet never in the least betrays to him, and hardly owns to herself, what mean and hateful qualities she knows or feels to be in him. It is not possible to over-state her simple artlessness of mind; while nevertheless her simplicity is of such a texture as to be an overmatch for all the unscrupulous wiles by which she is beset. Her betrayers, with all their mazy craft, can neither keep from her the secret of their thoughts nor turn her knowledge of it into any blemish of her innocence; nor is she less brave to face their purpose than penetrating to discover it. And when her resolution is fixed, that "nothing but death shall e'er divorce her dignities," it is not, and we feel it is not, that she holds the accidents of her position for one iota more than they are worth; but that these are to her the necessary symbols of her honour as a wife, and the inseparable garments of her delicacy as a woman; and as such they have so grown in with her life, that she cannot survive the parting with them; to say nothing of how they are bound up with her sentiments of duty, of ancestral reverence, and of self-respect. Moreover many hard, hard trials have made her conscious of her sterling virtue: she has borne too much, and borne it too well, to be ignorant of what she is and how much better things she has deserved; she knows, as she alone can know, that patience has had its perfect work with her: and this knowledge of her solid and true worth, so sorely tried, so fully proved, enhances to her sense the insult and wrong that are put upon her, making them eat like rust into her soul.

One instance deserves special noting, where, by the peculiar use of a single word, the authors well illustrate how Catharine "guides her words with discretion," and at the same time make her suggest the long, hard trial of temper and judgment which she has undergone. It is in her dialogue with the two Cardinals, when they visit her at Bridewell:

> "Bring me a constant woman to her husband,
> One that ne'er dream'd a joy beyond his pleasure;
> And to that woman, when she has done most,
> Yet will I add an honour, — *a great patience.*"

How much more is here understood than is expressed! By the cautious and well-guarded but pregnant hint conveyed in the last three words, the mind is thrown back upon the long course of trials she has suffered, and still kept her suffering secret, lest the knowledge thereof should defeat the cherished hope of her heart; with what considerate forbearance and reserve she has struggled against the worst parts of her husband's character; how she has wisely ignored his sins against herself, that so she might still keep alive in him a seed of grace and principle of betterment; thus endeavouring by conscientious art to make the best out of his strong but hard and selfish nature. Yet all this is so intimated as not to compromise at all the apprehensive delicacy which befits her relation to him, and belongs to her character.

The scope of this suggestion is well shown by a passage in the *Life of Wolsey*, referring to things that took place some time before the divorce was openly mooted. The writer is speaking of Anne Boleyn: "After she knew the King's pleasure and the bottom of his secret stomach, then she began to look very haughty and stout, lacking no manner of jewels and rich apparel that might be gotten for money. It was therefore judged by-and-by through the Court of every man, that she being in such favour might work masteries with the King, and obtain any suit of him for her friend. All this while, it is no doubt but good Queen Catharine, having this gentlewoman daily attending upon

her, both heard by report and saw with her eyes how it framed against her good ladyship: although she showed neither unto Mistress Anne Boleyn nor unto the King any kind or spark of grudge or displeasure; but accepted all things in good part, and with wisdom and great patience dissembled the same, having Mistress Anne in more estimation, for the King's sake, than she was before."

Catharine in her seclusion, and discrowned of all but her honour and her sorrow, is one of the authors' noblest and sweetest deliverances. She there leads a life of homely simplicity. Always beautiful on the throne, in her humiliation she is more beautiful still. She carries to the place no grudge or resentment or bitterness towards any; nothing but faith, hope, and charity; a touching example of womanly virtue and gentleness; hourly in Heaven for her enemies; her heart garrisoned with "the peace that passeth all understanding." Candid and plain herself, she loves and honours plainness and candour in others; and it seems a positive relief to her to hear the best spoken that can be of the fallen great man who did more than all the rest to work her fall. Her calling the messenger "a saucy fellow," who breaks in so abruptly upon her, discloses just enough of human weakness to make us feel that she is not quite an angel yet; and in her death-scene we have the divinest notes of a "soul by resignation sanctified."

The portrait of the King, all the circumstances considered in which it was drawn, is a very remarkable piece of work, being no less true to the original than politic as regards the authors: for the cause which Henry had been made to serve, though against his will, and from the very rampancy of his vices, had rendered it a long and hard process for the nation to see him as he was. The authors keep the worst parts of his character mainly in the background, veiling them withal so adroitly and so transparently as to suggest them to all who are willing to see them: in other words, they do not directly expose or affirm his moral hatefulness, but

place it silently in facts, and so make him characterize himself in a way to be felt: nay, they even make the other persons speak good things of him, but at the same time let him refute and reprove their words by his deeds. At all events, the man's hard-hearted and despotic capriciousness is brought to points of easy inference; yet the matter is carried by the authors with such an air of simplicity as if they were hardly aware of it; though, when one of the persons is made to say of Henry, "His conscience has crept too near another lady," it is manifest that the authors understood his character perfectly. His little traditional peculiarities of manner, which would be ridiculous, but that his freaky fierceness of temper renders them dreadful; and his mixture of hypocrisy and fanaticism, which endeavours to misderive his bad passions from Divine sources, and in the strength of which he is enabled to believe a lie, even while he knows it to be a lie, and because he wishes it true; — all these things are shown up, without malice indeed, but without mercy too. — Such and so great is the psychagogic refinement displayed in this delineation.

In the whole matter of the divorce, Henry is felt to be acting from motives which he does not avow: already possessed with a criminal passion for which he is lawlessly bent on making a way, he still wants to think he has strong public reasons for the measure, and that religion and conscience are his leading inducements; and he shows much cunning and ability in pressing these considerations into view: but it is plain enough that he rather tries to persuade himself they are true than really believes them to be so; though there is no telling how far, in this effort to hide the real cause from the world, he may strangle the sense of it in his own breast. All this, however, rather heightens the meanness than relieves the wickedness of his course. The power or the poison of self-deceit can indeed work wonders; and in such cases it is often extremely difficult to judge whether a man is wilfully deceiving others or unconsciously deceiving himself: in fact, the two often slide into each other, so

as to compound a sort of honest hypocrisy, or a state between belief and not-belief: but Henry wilfully embraces and hugs and holds fast the deceit, and rolls all arguments for it as sweet morsels under his tongue, because it offers a free course for his carnal-mindedness and raging self-will. But the history of his reign after the intellect of Wolsey and the virtue of Catharine were removed is the best commentary on the motives that swayed him at this time; and there I must leave him.

In the brief delineation of Anne Boleyn there is gathered up the essence of a long story. She is regarded much less for what she is in herself than for the gem that is to proceed from her; and her character is a good deal screened by the purpose of her introduction, though not so much but that it peeps significantly through. With little in her of a positive nature one way or the other; with hardly any legitimate object-matter of respect or confidence, she appears notwithstanding a rather amiable person; possessed with a girlish fancy and hankering for the vanities and glitterings of state, but having no sense of its duties and dignities. She has a kindly heart, but is so void of womanly principle and delicacy as to be from the first evidently elated by those royal benevolences which to any just sensibility of honour would minister nothing but humiliation and shame. She has a real and true pity for the good Queen, which however goes altogether on false grounds; and she betrays by the very terms of it an eager and uneasy longing after what she scarcely more fears than hopes the Queen is about to lose. As for the true grounds and sources of Catharine's noble sorrow, she strikes vastly below these, and this in such a way as to indicate an utter inability to reach or conceive them. Thus the effect of her presence is to set off and enhance that deep and solid character of whose soul truth is not so much a quality as the very substance and essential form; and who, from the serene and steady light thence shining within her, much rather than from acuteness or strength of intellect, is

enabled to detect the duplicity and serpentine policy which are playing their engines about her. For this thorough integrity of heart, this perfect truth in the inward parts, is as hard to be deceived as it is incapable of deceiving. I can well imagine that, with those of the audience who had any knowledge in English history, — and many of them no doubt had much, — the delineation of Anne, broken off as it is at the height of her fortune, must have sent their thoughts forward to reflect how the self-same levity of character, which lifted her into Catharine's place, soon afterwards drew upon herself a far more sudden and terrible reverse. And indeed some such thing may be needful, to excuse the authors for not carrying out the truth of history from seed-time to harvest, or at least indicating the consummation of that whereof they so faithfully unfold the beginnings.

The moral effect of this play as a whole is very impressive and very just. And the lesson evolved, so far as it admits of general statement, may be said to stand in showing how sorrow makes sacred the wearer, and how, to our human feelings, suffering, if borne with true dignity and strength of soul, covers a multitude of sins; or, to carry out the point with more special reference to Catharine, it consists, as Mrs. Jameson observes, in illustrating how, by the union of perfect truth with entire benevolence of character, a queen, and a heroine of tragedy, though "stripped of all the pomp of place and circumstance," and without any of "the usual sources of poetical interest, as youth, beauty, grace, fancy, commanding intellect, could depend on the moral principle alone to touch the very springs of feeling in our bosoms, and melt and elevate our hearts through the purest and holiest impulses."

SHAKESPEARE'S CHARACTERS.

TRAGEDIES.

ROMEO AND JULIET.

The story which furnished the ground-work of The Tragedy of Romeo and Juliet was exceedingly popular in Shakespeare's time. The original author of the tale as then received was Luigi da Porto, whose novel, *La Giulietta*, was first published in 1535. From him the matter was borrowed and improved by Bandello, who published it in 1554. Bandello represents the incidents to have occurred when Bartholomew Scaliger was lord of Verona; and the Veronese, who believe the tale to be historically true, fix its date in 1303, when the family of Scaliger held the government of the city.

The story is next met with in the French version of Belleforest, and makes the third in his collection of *Tragical Histories*. These were avowedly taken from Bandello. Some of them however vary considerably from the Italian; as, for example, in this piece Bandello brings Juliet out of her trance in time to hear Romeo speak and see him die; and then, instead of using his dagger against herself, she dies of a broken heart; whereas the French orders this matter the same as we have it in the play.

The earliest English version of the tale that has come down to us is a poem entitled *The Tragical History of Romeus and Juliet*, written by Arthur Brooke, and published in 1562. This purports to be from the Italian of Bandello; but it agrees with the French version in making

the heroine's trance continue till after the death of her lover. In some respects, however, the poem has the character of an original work; the author not tying himself strictly to any known authority, but drawing somewhat on his own invention. I say *known* authority, because in his introduction to the poem Brooke informs us that the tale had already been put to work on the English stage. As the play to which he refers has not survived, we have no means of knowing how the matter was there handled.

In 1567, five years after the date of Brooke's poem, a prose version of the same tale was published by William Paynter in his *Palace of Pleasure*, a collection of stories made up from divers sources, ancient and modern. This is merely a literal translation from the French of Belleforest, and by no means skilfully done, at that; though the interest of the tale is such as to triumph over the bungling workmanship of the translator.

These two are the only English forms of an earlier date than the tragedy, in which the story has reached us. But the contemporary notices of it are such and so many as to infer that it must have been a popular favourite. This popularity was doubtless owing in a large measure to the use of the story in dramatic form. We have seen that the matter had been set forth on the stage before the publication of Brooke's poem. That so great and general a favourite should have been suffered to leave the stage after having tried its strength there, is not probable; so that we may presume it to have been kept up on the boards in one form or another, till Shakespeare took it in hand, and so far eclipsed all who had touched it before, that their labours were left to perish.

Whether the Poet availed himself of any earlier drama on the subject, is not known. Nor, in fact, can we trace a connection between the tragedy and any other work, except Brooke's poem. That he made considerable use of this, is abundantly certain from divers verbal resemblances, as well as from a general likeness in the matter and the ordering

of the incidents. Perhaps I ought to add, that in sentiment, imagery, and versification the poem has very considerable merit, and, on the whole, may take rank among the best specimens we have of the popular English literature of that period. It is written in rhyme, the lines consisting alternately of twelve and fourteen syllables.

The tragedy was first printed in 1597, and copies of that date are still extant. It is evident from certain internal marks, that this edition was surreptitious, or at least unauthorized. The authorship is not stated in the title-page; but we have the words, "As it hath been often, with great applause, publicly played." The next issue of the play was in a quarto pamphlet dated 1599, with the following on its title-page: "The most excellent and lamentable Tragedy of Romeo and Juliet, newly corrected, augmented, and amended. As it hath been sundry times publicly acted by the Right-Honourable the Lord Chamberlain's Servants." The same text was reprinted in the same form in 1609, and again at a later period, which however cannot be ascertained, the edition being undated. The play reappeared in the folio of 1623.

Of course the Poet would hardly have undertaken to rewrite the play, had he not supposed he could make important changes for the better. Accordingly the second issue is a decided improvement on the first. How much the play was augmented is shown in that the text of 1597 is not quite three-fourths as long as that of 1599. And the difference of the two copies in respect of quality is still greater; while the changes are such as hardly to consist with the old notion of the Poet having been a careless or a hasty writer. For instance, the speech of Juliet on taking the sleeping-draught, and also that of Romeo just before he swallows the poison, are mere trifles in the first copy as compared with what they are in the second. The improvement in these cases and in many others is such as may well cause us to regret that the Poet did not carry his older

and riper hand into some parts of the play which he left unchanged.

The date more commonly assigned for the writing of the tragedy in its original form is 1596. This allows only a space of about two years between the writing and rewriting of the play; and I fully agree with Knight and Verplanck that the second issue shows such a measure of progress in judgment, in the cast of thought, and in dramatic power, as would naturally infer a much longer interval. And there is one item of internal evidence which would seem to throw the original composition as far back as the year 1591. This is in what the Nurse says when prattling of Juliet's age: "'Tis since the earthquake now eleven years; and she was wean'd"; which has been often quoted as a probable allusion to the earthquake that happened in England in the Spring of 1580, and "caused such amazedness among the people as was wonderful for the time." But arguments of this sort are very apt to pass for more than they are worth; and the most that I should affirm, with much confidence, is that the tragedy was written before 1595. The cast of thought and imagery, but especially the large infusion of the lyrical element, naturally associates it to the same stage of art and authorship which produced *A Midsummer-Night's Dream;* the resemblance of the two plays in these respects being, I think, too marked to escape any studious eye, well practised in discerning the Poet's different styles. And a comparison of *Romeo and Juliet* with the poetical portions of *King Henry the Fourth*, which was published in 1598, will suffice for concluding that the former must have been written at least several years before the latter.

We have seen that nearly all the incidents of the tragedy were borrowed. In fact, the Poet's invention herein is confined to the duel of Mercutio and Tybalt, and the meeting of Romeo and Paris at the tomb. In the older English versions of the tale, there is a general fight between the partisans of the two houses; when, after many have been

killed and wounded on both sides, Romeo comes in, tries to appease with gentle words the fury of Tybalt, and at last kills him in self-defence. The Poet's change in this point is highly judicious, as bringing in a large accession of dramatic life and spirit. In the older versions, also, Paris shows a cold and selfish policy in his love-suit, which dishonours both himself and the object of it. Shakespeare elevates him with the breath of nobler sentiment; and the character of the heroine is proportionably raised by the pathos shed round her second lover from the circumstances of his death. Moreover the incidents, throughout, are managed with the utmost skill for dramatic effect; so that what was before a lazy and lymphatic narrative is made redundant of animation and interest.

In respect of character, also, the play has little of formal originality beyond Mercutio and the Nurse; who are as different as can well be imagined from any thing that was done to the Poet's hand. And all the other characters, though the forms of them are partly borrowed, are set forth with an idiomatic sharpness and vitality of delineation, to which the older versions of the tale make no approach. But what is most worthy of remark on this point is, that Shakespeare just inverts the relation of things: before, the persons served but as a sort of frame-work to support the story; here the story is used but as canvas for the portraiture of character and life. So that, notwithstanding the large borrowings, the play has eminently the stamp of an original work; and, which is more, an acquaintance with the sources drawn upon nowise abates our sense of its originality.

Before proceeding further, I must make some abatements from the indiscriminate praise which this drama has of late received. For criticism, in its natural and just reaction from the mechanical methods formerly in vogue, has run to the opposite extreme of unreserved special-pleading, and hunting out of nature after reasons for unqualified ap-

proval; by which course it stultifies itself without really helping the subject. Now I cannot deny, and care not to disguise, that some parts of this play are sadly blemished with ingenious and elaborate affectations. For instance, Romeo, in the first dialogue he holds with Benvolio, has the following about love:

> "O heavy lightness! serious vanity!
> Misshapen chaos of well-seeming forms!
> Feather of lead, bright smoke, cold fire, sick health!
> Still-waking sleep, that is not what it is!"

This string of antithetical conceits seems absurd enough. To be sure, the passage occurs before the hero's soul has been fired by the vision of Juliet, and while his mind is busy with the dreamy, moonshine image of Rosaline; and he may be excused for playing with these smoke-wreaths of fancy, inasmuch as the true flame is not yet kindled in his heart. I must add, that such was the most approved way of describing love in Shakespeare's time, and for some ages before: Petrarch and Chaucer used it, and divers old English poets and ballad-makers abound in it. But the best defence of it in this case is, that such an affected way of speaking not unaptly shows the state of Romeo's mind under a passion that is self-generated, instead of being inspired by an external object. At all events, as compared with his style of speech after meeting with Juliet, it serves to mark the difference between being *love-sick* and being *in love*.

But no such excuse will hold in several other cases; especially when we have the heroine dallying with similar quirks of fancy even in her most impassioned moments; as in the dialogue she has with the Nurse on first hearing of Tybalt's death and Romeo's banishment. Yet Knight boldly justifies these fantastical strains, as being "the results of strong emotion seeking to relieve itself by violent efforts of the intellect, that the will may recover its balance." Which is either a piece of far-fetched attorneyship, or else it is too deep for my comprehension. No, no! such things are plain disfigurements and blemishes, and criticism will

best serve its proper end by calling them so. And if there be any good apology for them, doubtless it is, that they grew from the general custom and conventional pressure of the time, and were written before the Poet had by practice and experience worked himself above custom into the original strength and rectitude of his genius. I care not how much they are set down as faults of the age, not of the man, so they do not pass for other than faults. And I submit that any unsophisticated criticism, however liberal and broad, will naturally regard them as the effects of imitation, not of mental character, because they are out of keeping with the general style of the piece, and strike against the grain of the sentiment which that style inspires. We experience an unpleasant *hitch* of the sympathies whenever we come upon those passages; as if the author were obtruding his own crotchets upon us, instead of leaving us to the native and free transpiration of his characters. It should be noted withal, that the fault disappears after the third Act, and is met with in none of those passages which were new in the second edition.

Bating certain considerable drawbacks on this score, the play gives the impression of having been all conceived and struck out in the full heat and glow of youthful passion; as if the Poet's genius were for the time thoroughly possessed with the spirit and temper of the subject; while at the same time the passion is so pervaded with the light and grace of imagination, that it kindles only to ennoble and exalt. For richness of poetical colouring, — dispensed with lavish hand indeed, but yet so managed as not to interfere either with the development of character or the proper dramatic effect, but rather to help them both, — it may challenge a comparison with any of the Poet's dramas.

Of course, this play as a whole derives its character and idiom from the passion of the hero and heroine, all the parts being fused together in the energy of that. It is therefore as much a tragedy of love as *Hamlet* is a tragedy

of thought. And it is the only one of Shakespeare's plays which proceeds, throughout, with supreme reference to that passion. Touching the unity of feeling which marks this drama, — an unity that has both its organic law and its efficient cause in that same passion, — Coleridge has a strain of criticism that ought always to go with the subject: "Read *Romeo and Juliet:* all is youth and Spring; youth with its follies, its virtues, its precipitances; Spring with its odours, its flowers, and its transiency: it is one and the same feeling that commences, goes through, and ends the play. The old men, the Capulets and the Montagues, are not common old men; they have an eagerness, a heartiness, a vehemence, the effect of Spring: with Romeo, his change of passion, his sudden marriage, and his rash death, are all the effects of youth; whilst in Juliet love has all that is tender and melancholy in the nightingale, all that is voluptuous in the rose, with whatever is sweet in the freshness of Spring; but it ends with a long deep sigh, like the last breeze of an Italian evening."

In accordance with what is here noted, we find every thing on the run; all the passions of the drama are in the same fiery-footed and unmanageable excess: the impatient vehemence of old Capulet, the furious valour of Tybalt, the brilliant volubility of Mercutio, the petulant loquacity of the Nurse, being all but so many issues of the reigning irritability and impetuosity. Amid this general stress of impassioned life, old animosities are rekindled, old feuds have broken out anew; while the efforts of private friendship and public authority to quench the strife only go to prove it unquenchable, the same violent passions that have caused the tumults being brought to the suppression of them. The prevalence of extreme hate serves of course to generate the opposite extreme; out of the most passionate and fatal enmities there naturally springs a love as passionate and fatal. With dispositions too gentle and noble to share in the animosities so rife about them, the hearts of the lovers are rendered thereby the more alive and

open to impressions of a contrary nature; the fierce rancour of their Houses only swelling in them the emotions that prevent their sympathizing with it.

Thus the Poet carries us smoothly along through all the aching joys and giddy transports of the lovers, by his manner of disposing the objects and persons about them; the leading passion, intense as it is, being so associated with others of like intensity, that we receive it without any sense of disproportion to nature; whereas, if cut out of the harmony in which it moves, it would seem overwrought and improbable. For who does not see how the feelings are here raised and sustained by a continuity of impression running from person to person, and thus authenticating the whole? In other words, we have no difficulty in sympathizing with the main part, because all the parts are in sympathy with each other. And the Poet secures this result with so much ease as not to betray his exertions; his means are hidden in the skill with which he uses them; and we forget the height to which he soars, because he has the strength of wing to bear us along with him, or rather gives us wings to rise with him of ourselves.

One of the plainest things in human life, and yet one of the hardest for men to learn, is, that Nature will have her course in one shape or another. The more you put down her rights, the more you will be put down in turn by her wrongs. If you repress her native passions by factitious rules and manners, first you know those passions will somehow combine with your machinery of repression: the very prison of ice, with which you think to freeze up her outlets, will nurse an inward volcano, to explode against you. And such is the general condition of life depicted in this drama. It is a most artificial state of society, where all the safety-valves of nature are closed up by an oppressive conventionality, and where the better passions, being clogged down to their source, have turned their strength into the worse. People must live all by rule, nothing by instinct; that is,

their life is to be a form impressed from without, not unfolded from within. But the spontaneous forces of nature will assert themselves either for good or for evil. We have a choice outcropping of this in the first scene of the play; where it is evident that the underlings of the two Houses have caught the fury of their masters, and are spiteful and quarrelsome for no other reason than that their natural fires are so much stifled beneath the artificial crust. They must needs fight, because to ape their betters has become a passion with them; which could hardly be the case, but that passion and imitation have got forced into an unnatural mixture or alliance; for it is against the proper instinct of passion to be imitative.

To take another view of the matter: Principle and impulse are often spoken of as opposed to each other. And, as men are, such is indeed too often the case; but in ingenuous natures, and in well-ordered societies, the two grow forth together, each serving to unfold and deepen the other; so that we have principle warmed into impulse, and impulse fixed into principle. This gives us what may be described as a character informed with noble passions. And, say what we will, bad passions will have the mastery of a man, unless there be good ones to countervail them. For Reason, do the best she can, is not enough: men must love; and their proper safeguard is in having their love married to truth and virtue. When such is the case, the state of man is at peace and unity: otherwise, he is a house divided against itself, where principle and impulse strive each for supremacy, and rule by turns; headlong and sensual in his passions, cunning and selfish in his reason.

Now this fatal divorce of reason and passion is the rule of life as represented in this drama. The generous impulses of nature are overborne and stifled by a discipline of selfishness. Boldly calculative where they ought to be impassioned, people are of course blindly passionate where they ought to be deliberate and cool. Even marriage is plainly stripped of its sacredness, made an affair of expediency, not

of religion, insomuch that a previous union of hearts is discouraged, lest it should interfere with a prudent union of hands. Thus the hearts of the young are, if possible, kept sealed against all deep and strong impressions, and the development of the nobler impulses foreclosed by the icy considerations of interest and policy. Think you that Nature can with impunity be thus oppressed? She will revolt.

Amidst this heart-withering tyranny of custom, the hero and heroine stand out the unschooled and unspoiled creatures of native sense and native sensibility. Art has tried its utmost upon them, but Nature has proved too strong for it. In the silent creativeness of youth their feelings have insensibly matured themselves; and they come before us glowing with the warmth of natural sentiment, with susceptibilities deep as life, and waiting only for the kindling touch of passion. To go through life with a set of feelings ready-made, brewed together for social convenience, and then pumped into them, was a destiny which, from their innate strength of soul, they could not embrace. So that they exemplify the simplicity of nature thriving amidst the most artificial manners: nay, they are the more natural for the excess of art around them; as if nature, driven from the hearts of others, had taken refuge in theirs.

Principle, however, is as strong in them as passion: they have the purity as well as the impulsiveness of nature; and because they are free from immodest desires, therefore they put forth no angelic pretensions. Idolizing each other, they would nevertheless make none but permitted offerings. Not being led by the conventionalities of life, they therefore are not to be misled by them: as their hearts are joined in mutual love, so their hands must be joined in mutual honour; for, while loving each other with a love as boundless as the sea, they at the same time love in each other whatsoever is pure and precious in their unsoiled imaginations. Thus their fault lies, not in the nature of their passion, but in its excess, — that they love each other in a

degree that is due only to their Maker: but this is a natural reaction from that idolatry of interest and self which pervades the rest of society, turning marriage into merchandise, and sacrificing the holiest instincts of nature to avarice, ambition, and pride.

The lovers, it is true, are not much given to reflection, because this is a thing that can come to them only by experience, which they are yet without. Life lies glittering with golden hopes before them, owing all its enchantment perhaps to the distance: if their bliss seems perfect, it is only because their bounty is infinite; but such bounty and such bliss "may not with mortal man abide." Bereft of the new life they have found in each other, nothing remains for them but the bitter dregs from which the wine has all evaporated; and they dash to earth the stale and vapid draught, when it has lost all the spirit that caused it to foam and sparkle before them. Nevertheless it is not their passion, but the enmity of their Houses, that is punished in their death; and the awful lesson we read in their fate is against that barbarism of civilization which makes love excessive by trying to exclude it from its rightful place in life, and which subjects men to the just revenges of Nature, because it puts them upon thwarting her noblest purposes. Were we deep in the ways of Providence, we might doubtless forecast from the first, that these two beings, the pride and hope of their respective friends, would, even because themselves most innocent, fall a sacrifice to the guilt of their families; and that in and through their death would be punished and healed those fatal strifes and animosities which have made it at once so natural and so dangerous for them to love.

It has been aptly remarked that the hero and heroine of this play, though in love, are not love-sick. Romeo, however, as we have seen, is something love-sick before his meeting with Juliet. His seeming love for Rosaline is but a matter of fancy, with which the heart has little or nothing to do. That Shakespeare so intended it, is plain from

what is said about it in the Chorus at the end of the first Act, especially the two quaint lines, —

> "Now old desire doth in his death-bed lie,
> And young affection gapes to be his heir."

The same thing is worked out, with a higher grace of art and a much riper insight of nature, in the case of the love-sick Duke Orsino, of *Twelfth Night*, in his wordy, sighful quest of Olivia. There is evidently no soul-seizure nor any thing genuine about it; and Orsino himself knows it was only a mock-spell, as soon as he gets disenchanted.

Accordingly Romeo's first passion is airy, affected, fantastical, causing him to think much of his feelings, to count over his sighs, and play with language, as pleased with the figure he is making; which shows that his thoughts are not so much on Rosaline, or any thing he has found in her, as on a figment of his own mind, which he has baptized into her name, and invested with her form. This is just that sort of love with which people often imagine themselves about to die, but which they always manage to survive, and that, without any further harm than the making them somewhat ridiculous. For when a man is truly in love, it is not his own health, but the health of another person, that he thinks about. Romeo's love is a thing infinitely different. A mere idolater, Juliet converts him into a true worshipper; and the fire of his new passion burns up the old idol of his fancy. Love works a sort of regeneration upon him: his dreamy, sentimental fancy giving place to a passion that interests him thoroughly in an external object, all his fine energies are forthwith tuned into harmony and eloquence, so that he becomes a true man, with every thing clear and healthy and earnest about him. As the Friar suggests, it was probably from an instinctive sense that he was making love by rote, and not by heart, that Rosaline rejected his suit. The dream, though, has the effect of preparing him for the reality, while the contrast between them helps our appreciation of the latter.

Hazlitt pronounces Romeo to be Hamlet in love; than which he could not well have made a greater mistake. In all that most truly constitutes character, the two, it seems to me, have nothing in common. To go no further, Hamlet is all procrastination, Romeo all precipitancy: the one reflects so much that he cannot act; the other acts first, and does his reflecting afterwards. With Hamlet, it is a necessity of nature to think; with Romeo, to love: the former, studious of consequences, gets entangled with a multitude of conflicting passions and purposes; the latter, absorbed in one passion and one purpose, drives right ahead, regardless of consequences. It is this necessity of loving that, until the proper object appears, creates in Romeo an object for itself: hence the love-bewilderment in which he first comes before us. Which explains and justifies the suddenness and vehemence of his passion, while the difference between this and his fancy-sickness amply vindicates him from the reproach of inconstancy.

Being of passion all compact, Romeo of course does not generalize, nor give much heed to abstract truth. Intelligent, indeed, of present facts and occasions, he does not however study to shape his feelings or conduct by any rules: he therefore sees no use of philosophy in his case, unless philosophy can make a Juliet; nor does he care to hear others speak of what they do not feel. He has no life but passion, and passion lives altogether in and by its object: therefore it is that he dwells with such wild exaggeration on the sentence of banishment. Thus his love, by reason of its excess, exalting a subordinate into a sovereign good, defeats its own security and peace. Had he stayed himself more on general considerations of life; had he tempered his interest in the transient with a due thoughtfulness of the permanent; he would have been a wiser man indeed, but not so entire a lover.

Yet there is a sort of instinctive rectitude in his passion, which makes us rather pity than blame its excess; and we feel that death comes to him through it, not for it. We

can scarce conceive any thing more full of manly sweetness and gentleness than his character. Love is the only thing wherein he seems to lack self-control; and this is the very thing wherein self-control is least a virtue. He will peril his life for a friend, but he will not do a mean thing to save it; has no pride and revenge to which he would sacrifice others, but has high and brave affections to which he will not shrink from sacrificing himself. Thus even in his resentments he is in noble contrast with those about him. His heart is so preoccupied with generous thought, as to afford no room for those furious transports which prove so fatal in others: where their swords jump in wild fury from the scabbards, his sleeps quietly by his side: but then, as he is very hard to provoke, so is he very dangerous when provoked. For so it is when Tybalt would force him to a duel:

> "Romeo still speaks him fair, bids him bethink
> How nice the quarrel is; and this he urges
> With gentle breath, calm look, knees humbly bow'd."

He will not be stung out of his propriety by words of insult. But when he learns that the mad fire-spouter has killed his bold friend Mercutio, and is coming back in triumph, then all his manhood boils with irrepressible energy:

> "Away to heaven, respective lenity!
> And fire-ey'd fury be my conduct now! —
> Now, Tybalt, take the *villain* back again
> That late thou gav'st me; for Mercutio's soul
> Is but a little way above our heads,
> Staying for thine to keep him company:
> Either thou, or I, or both, must go with him."

In all this affair he plays the man, and all the parts of honour are held true to their just aim; thus exemplifying in perfect form the great law of heroism, that he who rightly fears to do wrong has nothing else to fear.

Shakespeare has few passages in a higher pitch of eloquence than Romeo's soliloquy at the tomb; where we have a tempest of various emotions, love, sorrow, pity, regret,

admiration, despair, all subdued and blended in a strain of the most plaintive, sweetly-solemn music:

> "What said my man, when my betossèd soul
> Did not attend him as we rode? I think
> He told me Paris should have married Juliet:
> Said he not so? or did I dream it so?
> Or am I mad, hearing him talk of Juliet,
> To think it was so? — O, give me thy hand,
> One writ with me in sour misfortune's book!
> I'll bury thee in a triumphant grave, —
> A grave! O, no! a lantern, slaughter'd youth;
> For here lies Juliet, and her beauty makes
> This vault a feasting presence full of light. —
> How oft, when men are at the point of death,
> Have they been merry! — O, my love! my wife!
> Thou art not conquer'd; beauty's ensign yet
> Is crimson in thy lips and in thy cheeks,
> And Death's pale flag is not advancèd there. —
> Tybalt, liest thou there in thy bloody sheet?
> O, what more favour can I do to thee,
> Than with that hand that cut thy youth in twain,
> To sunder his that was thine enemy?
> Forgive me, cousin! — Ah, dear Juliet!
> Why art thou yet so fair? Shall I believe
> That unsubstantial Death is amorous;
> And that the lean abhorrèd monster keeps
> Thee here in dark to be his paramour?
> For fear of that, I still will stay with thee;
> And never from this palace of dim night
> Depart again: here, here will I remain
> With worms that are thy chambermaids; O, here
> Will I set up my everlasting rest;
> And shake the yoke of inauspicious stars
> From this world-wearied flesh."

With what vividness every article of this speech tells of the speaker's whereabout! All is surpassingly idiomatic of the spot, supremely characteristic of the man; not a thought, not an image, not a word, that could have come from any one but Romeo, or could have come from him at any other time, or in any other place. How prompt, how piercing, how kindling, his mental eye! seeing every thing

just as it is, and yet, from his preternatural illumination of mind, looking every thing full of his own passion, and turning it into something rich and rare. For his essential grace of imagination, touched with new virtue, as it is, by the genius of the place, beautifies all the dishonours of the grave, and sweetens its very offences into dearness: he sees but the presence of his Juliet; and he knows no home, no paradise but that; and whatever shares in that is precious to his sense. — Such is the strength, such the elevation, such the spiritualizing power of wedded love, as here depicted!

Mr. Hallam — a man who weighs his words well before speaking them — gives as his opinion, that "it is impossible to place Juliet among the great female characters of Shakespeare's creation." Other critics of high repute, especially Mrs. Jameson, take a different view: but this may result in part from the representation being so charged, not to say overcharged, with poetic warmth and splendour, as to hinder a cool and steady judgment of the character. For the passion in which Juliet lives is most potently infectious: one can hardly venture near enough to see what and whence it is, without falling under its influence: while in her case it is so fraught with purity and tenderness, and self-forgetting ardour and constancy, and has so much withal to challenge a respectful pity, that the moral sense does not easily find where to fix its notes of reproof. And if, in her intoxication of soul and sense, she loses whatever of reason her youth and inexperience can have gathered, the effect is breathed forth with an energy and elevation of spirit, and in a transporting affluence of thought and imagery, which none but the sternest readers can well resist, and which, after all, there may be not much virtue in resisting.

I have to confess, however, that Juliet appears something better as a heroine than as a woman, the reverse of which commonly holds in the Poet's delineations. But then she is a real heroine, in the best sense of the term; her woman-

hood being developed through her heroism, not eclipsed nor obscured by it. Wherein she differs from the general run of tragic heroines, who act as if they knew not how to be heroic without becoming something mannish or viraginous; the trouble with them being, that they set out with a special purpose to be heroines, and to approve themselves such: whereas Juliet is surprised into heroism, and acts the heroine without knowing it, simply because it is in her to do so, and, when the occasion comes, she cannot do otherwise.

It is not till the marriage with Paris is forced upon her, that her proper heroism displays itself. All her feelings as a woman, a lover, and a wife, are then thoroughly engaged; and because her heart is all truth, therefore it stands a fixed necessity with her, either "to live an unstain'd wife to her sweet love," or else to die. To avert what is to her literally an *infinite* evil, she appeals imploringly to father, to mother, and the Nurse, in succession; nor is it till she is cast entirely on her own strength that she finds herself sufficient for herself. There is something truly fearful in the resolution and energy of her discourse with the Friar; yet we feel that she is still the same soft, tender, gentle being whose breath was lately so rich and sweet with words of love.

> "God join'd my heart and Romeo's, thou our hands;
> And ere this hand, by thee to Romeo seal'd,
> Shall be the label to another deed,
> Or my true heart with treacherous revolt
> Turn to another, this shall slay them both.
> Therefore, out of thy long-experienc'd time,
> Give me some present counsel; or, behold,
> 'Twixt my extremes and me this bloody knife
> Shall play the umpire, arbitrating that
> Which the commission of thy years and art
> Could to no issue of true honour bring."

When told the desperate nature of the remedy, she rises to a yet higher pitch, her very terror of the deed inspiring her with fresh energy of purpose. And when she comes to

the performance, she cannot indeed arrest the workings of her imagination, neither can those workings shake her resolution: on the contrary, in their reciprocal action each adds vigour and intensity to the other; the terrific images which throng upon her excited fancy developing within her a strength and courage to face them. In all which there is indeed much of the heroine, but then the heroism is the free, spontaneous, unconscious outcome of her native womanhood.

It is well worth noting how the different qualities of the female character are in this representation distributed. Juliet has both the weakness and the strength of a woman, and she has them in the right, that is, the natural places. For, if she appears as frail as the frailest of her sex in the process of becoming a lover, her frailty ends with that process: weak in yielding to the touch of passion, she is thenceforth strong as a seraph. Thus it is in the cause of the wife that the greatness proper to her as a woman transpires. Moore, in his *Life of Byron*, speaks of this as a peculiarity of the Italian women; but surely it is nowise peculiar to them, save that they may have it in a larger measure than others; though even that is doubtful. For I think the general rule of women everywhere is, that the easiest to fall in love are the hardest to get out of it, and at the same time the most religiously tenacious of their honour in it.

It is very considerable that Juliet, though subject to the same necessity of loving as Romeo, is nevertheless quite exempt from the delusions of fancy, and therefore never gets bewildered with a love of her own making. The elements of passion in her do not act, it is against her nature that they should act, in such a way as to send her in quest of an object: indeed those elements are a secret even to herself: she suspects not their existence, till the proper object appears, because it is the inspiration of that object that kindles them. Her modesty, too, is much like Romeo's honour; that is, it is a living attribute of her character, and

not a result of conventional pressure. She therefore does not try to disguise or conceal from herself the impulses of her nature, because they are justly sanctified to her by the religion of her heart. On this point, especially with reference to the famous soliloquy at the beginning of the second scene of the third Act, I will leave her in the hands of Mrs. Jameson; who with a rare gift to see what is right joins an equal felicity in expressing it. "Let it be remembered," says she, "that in this speech Juliet is not supposed to be addressing an audience, nor even a confidante; and I confess I have been shocked at the utter want of taste and refinement in those who, with coarse derision, or in a spirit of prudery yet more gross and perverse, have dared to comment on this beautiful Hymn to the Night, breathed out by Juliet in the silence and solitude of her chamber. She is thinking aloud; it is the young heart 'triumphing to itself in words'; and her impatience, to use her own expression, is truly that of 'a child before a festival, that hath new robes and may not wear them.'"

The Nurse is in some respects another edition of Mrs. Quickly, though in a different binding. The character has a tone of reality that almost startles us on a first acquaintance. She gives the impression of a literal transcript from actual life; which is doubtless owing in part to the predominance of memory in her mind; as in her account of Juliet's age, where she cannot go on without bringing in all the accidents of the subject just as they fell out in the order of place and time. And she has a way of repeating the same thing in the same words, so that it strikes us as a fact cleaving to her thoughts, and exercising a sort of fascination over them. She is idealized indeed, but rather idealized into the dirt than out of it.

This general passiveness of mind naturally makes her whole character "smell of the shop." She takes the print of circumstances without the least mitigation, and holds it unmodified by any force from within. And she has a cer-

tain vulgarized air of rank and refinement, as if, priding herself on the confidence of her superiors, she had caught and assimilated their manners to her own vulgar nature. In this mixture of refinement and vulgarity, both elements are made the worse for being together; for, like all who ape their betters, she exaggerates whatever she copies; or, borrowing the proprieties of those above her, she turns them into their opposite, because she has no *sense* of propriety. Without a particle of truth or honour or delicacy; one to whom life has no sacredness, virtue no beauty, love no holiness; a woman, in short, without womanhood; she abounds however in serviceable qualities; has just that low menial shrewdness which at once fits her to be an instrument, and makes her proud to be used as such. Yet she acts not so much from a positive disregard of right as from a lethargy of conscience; or as if her soul had run itself into a sort of moral dry-rot through a leak at the mouth.

Accordingly in her basest acts she never dreams but that she is a pattern of virtue. And because she is thus unconscious and, as it were, innocent of her own vices, therefore Juliet thinks her free from them, and suspects not but that beneath her petulant, vulgar loquacity she has a vein of womanly honour and sensibility. For she has, in her way, a real affection for Juliet: whatsoever would give pleasure to herself, that she will do any thing to compass for her young mistress; and, until love and marriage become the question, there has never been any thing to disclose the essential oppugnancy of their natures. When, however, in her noble agony, Juliet appeals to the Nurse for counsel, and is met with the advice to marry Paris, she sees at once what her soul is made of; that her former praises of Romeo were but the offspring of a sensual pruriency easing itself with talk; that in her long life she has gained only that sort of experience which works the debasement of its possessor; and that she knows less than nothing of love and marriage, because she has worn their prerogatives without any feeling of their sacredness.

Mercutio is one of the instances which strikingly show the excess of Shakespeare's powers above his performances. Though giving us more than any other man, still he seems to have given but a small part of himself. For we feel that he could have gone on indefinitely with the same exquisite redundancy of life and wit which he has started in Mercutio. As aiming rather to instruct us with character than to entertain us with talk, he lets off just enough of the latter to disclose the former, and then stops, leaving the impression of an inexhaustible abundance withheld to give scope for something better. From the nature of the subject he had to leave unsatisfied the desire which in Mercutio is excited. Delightful as the man is, the Poet valued, and makes us value, his room more than his company. It has been said that he was obliged to kill off Mercutio, lest Mercutio should kill the play. And, sure enough, it is not apparent how he could have kept Mercutio and Tybalt in the play without spoiling it, nor how he could have kept them out without killing them: for so long as they live they must needs have a chief hand in whatever is going on about them; and they can scarce have a hand in any thing, without turning it, the one into a comedy, the other into a butchery. The Poet, however, so manages them and their fate as to aid rather than interrupt the proper interest of the piece; the impression of their death, strong as it is, being overcome by the sympathy awakened in us with the living.

Mercutio is a perfect embodiment of animal spirits acting in and through the brain. So long as the life is in him his blood must dance, and so long as the blood dances the brain and tongue must play. His veins seem filled with sparkling champagne. Always revelling in the conscious fulness of his resources, he pours out and pours out, heedless whether he speaks sense or nonsense; nay, his very stumblings seem designed as triumphs of agility; he studies, apparently, for failures, as giving occasion for further trials, and thus serving at once to provoke his skill and to set it off. Full of

the most companionable qualities, he often talks loosely indeed, but not profanely; and even in his loosest talk there is a subtilty and refinement both of nature and of breeding, that mark him for the prince of good fellows. Nothing could more finely evince the essential frolicsomeness of his composition, than that, with his ruling passion strong in death, he should play the wag in the face of his grim enemy, as if to live and to jest were the same thing with him.

Of Mercutio's wit it were vain to attempt an analysis. From a fancy as quick and aerial as the Aurora Borealis, the most unique and graceful combinations come forth with almost inconceivable facility and felicity. If wit consists in a peculiar briskness, airiness, and apprehensiveness of spirit, catching, as by instinct, the most remote and delicate affinities, and putting things together most unexpectedly and at the same time most appositely, then it can hardly be denied that Mercutio is the prince of wits as well as of good fellows.

I have always felt a special comfort in the part of Friar Laurence. How finely his tranquillity contrasts with the surrounding agitation! And how natural it seems that from that very agitation he should draw lessons of tranquillity! Calm, thoughtful, benevolent, withdrawing from the world, that he may benefit society the more for being out of it, his presence and counsel in the play are as oil poured, yet poured in vain, on troubled waters. Sympathizing quietly yet deeply with the very feelings in others which in the stillness of thought he has subdued in himself, the storms that waste society only kindle in him the sentiments that raise him above them; while his voice, issuing from the heart of humanity, speaks peace, but cannot give it, to the passions that are raging around him.

Schlegel has remarked with his usual discernment on the skill with which the Poet manages to alleviate the miracle of the sleeping-potion; and how, by throwing an air of

mysterious wisdom round the Friar, he renders us the more apt to believe strange things concerning him; representing him as so conjunctive and inward with Nature, that incredulity as to what he does is in a great measure forestalled by impressions of reverence for his character. "How," says he, "does the Poet dispose us to believe that Friar Laurence possesses such a secret? He exhibits him first in a garden, collecting herbs, and descanting on their wonderful virtues. The discourse of the pious old man is full of deep meaning: he sees everywhere in Nature emblems of the moral world; the same wisdom with which he looks through her has also made him master of the human heart. In this way, what would else have an ungrateful appearance, becomes the source of a great beauty."

Much fault has been found with the winding-up of this play, that it does not stop with the death of Juliet. Looking merely to the uses of the stage, it might indeed be better so; but Shakespeare wrote for humanity as well as, yea, rather than, for the stage. And as the evil fate of the lovers springs from the bitter feud of their Houses, and from a general stifling of nature under a hard crust of artificial manners, he wisely represents their fate as reacting upon and removing the cause. We are thus given to see and feel that they have not suffered in vain; and the heart has something to mitigate and humanize its over-pressure of grief. The absorbing, devouring selfishness of society generates the fiercest rancour between the leading families, and that rancour issues in the death of the very members through whom they had thought most to advance their rival pretensions; earth's best and noblest creatures are snatched away, because, by reason of their virtue, they can best afford to die, and because, for the same reason, their death will be most bitterly deplored. The good old Friar indeed thought that by the marriage of the lovers the rancour of their Houses would be healed. But a Wiser than he knew that the deepest touch of sorrow was required, to

awe and melt their proud, selfish hearts; that nothing short of the most afflicting bereavement, together with the feeling that themselves had both caused it and deserved it, could teach them rightly to "prize the breath they share with human kind," and remand them to the impassioned attachments of nature. Accordingly the hatred that seemed immortal is buried in the tomb of the faithful lovers; families are reconciled, society renovated, by the storm that has passed upon them; the tyranny of selfish custom is rebuked and broken up by the insurrection of nature which itself has provoked; tears flow, hearts are softened, hands joined, truth, tenderness, and piety inspired, by the noble example of devotion and self-sacrifice which stands before them. Such is the sad but wholesome lesson to be gathered from the story of "Juliet and her Romeo."

It may have been remarked, that I habitually speak of Shakespeare's men and women as if they were veritable flesh-and-blood persons, actual "travellers between life and death," just as we are. Whatever of folly or absurdity there may be in such a course, I must plead guilty to it. If it be asked why I so speak of them, the answer is, because I cannot help it. To me their virtues are as true as those of the friends I have loved and mourned, their sorrows as real and as close to the heart as any I have felt or pitied. I have much the same life in their society as in that of my breathing fellow-travellers, with this addition, that I know sickness cannot wither their bloom, nor death make spoil of their sweetness. Sometimes indeed they appear to me, with all their thoughts and feelings, more real, more living, than the human forms I see about me, and even than myself. So it is with the characters of this play; so it is with those of many others. And as often as I renew my intercourse with them, I am reminded of an incident related by Wordsworth in one of his smaller poems. An eminent British artist being on a visit at the Escurial, a

venerable monk was guiding him through the convent, and showing him the paintings; and, as they both stood with eyes intent on Titian's picture of the Last Supper,

> "The hoary Father in the Stranger's ear
> Breathed out these words: 'Here daily do we sit,
> Thanks given to God for daily bread, and here,
> While thinking of my brethren, dead, dispersed,
> Or changed and changing, I not seldom gaze
> Upon this solemn company unmoved
> By shock of circumstance or lapse of years,
> Until I cannot but believe that they,
> They are in truth the substance, we the shadows.'"

JULIUS CÆSAR.

THE TRAGEDY OF JULIUS CÆSAR was first printed in the folio of 1623. None of the plays in that inestimable volume have reached us with the text in a sounder and clearer state; there being few passages that give an editor any trouble, none that are very troublesome.

The Rev. Mr. Fleay, in his *Shakespeare Manual*, 1876, argues somewhat strenuously to the point that "this play, as we have it, is an abridgment of Shakespeare's play, made by Ben Jonson." In support of his theory he alleges, and truly, that Jonson did in fact exercise his hand more or less in altering and refitting other men's plays. He also points out the fact, — for such it is, — that the number of short lines or broken verses in *Julius Cæsar* is uncommonly large. And he cites several words and phrases, such as "quality and kind," "bear me hard," "chew upon this," &c., which do not occur elsewhere in Shakespeare; while the same words and phrases, or something very like them, are met with in Jonson's plays. Still more to the purpose, he adduces a passage in Act iii., scene 1, which is evidently referred to in Jonson's *Discoveries*, 1637, and which, in all

probability, — as I think, — has been altered, perhaps by Jonson's hand, from what Shakespeare wrote.

Such are the main particulars urged by Mr. Fleay. His argument shows a good deal of learned diligence; still it does not, to my mind, carry any great force, certainly is far from being conclusive, and, as the Clarendon Editor observes, is "not such as the readers of Shakepeare have a right to demand." Nevertheless, as, on comparing the quarto and folio copies, we find that the folio has several other plays more or less abridged, some to the extent of whole scenes; so I think it nowise improbable that, after Shakespeare's retirement from the stage, perhaps after his death, *Julius Cæsar* may have been subjected to the same process, and for the same purpose, namely, to shorten the time of representation. If this was done, it is altogether credible that Jonson may have been the man who did it; but I fail to catch any taste of Jonson's style or any smack of his idiom in the play as it stands. So that, while conceding that he may have struck out more or less of Shakespeare's matter, still I am by no means prepared to admit that he put in any thing of his own; though, possibly enough, in a few places, as in that already specified, he may have slightly altered Shakespeare's language.

There were several other plays on the subject of Julius Cæsar, written some before, some after, the composition of Shakespeare's play; but, as no connection has been traced between any of these and Shakespeare's, it seems hardly worth the while to make any further notice of them.

The time when *Julius Cæsar* was composed has been variously argued, some placing it in the middle period of the Poet's labours, others among the latest; and, as no clear contemporary notice or allusion had been produced, the question could not be positively determined. It is indeed well known that the original *Hamlet* must have been written as early as 1602; and in iii. 2 of that play Polonius says, "I did enact Julius Cæsar: I was killed in the Capitol;

Brutus killed me." As the play now in hand lays the scene of the stabbing in the Capitol, it is not improbable, to say the least, that the Poet had his own *Julius Cæsar* in mind when he wrote the passage in *Hamlet*. And that such was the case is made further credible by the fact, that Polonius speaks of himself as having enacted the part when he "play'd once in the University," and that in the title-page of the first edition of *Hamlet* we have the words, "As it hath been divers times acted by his Highness' Servants in the city of London; as also in the two Universities of Cambridge and Oxford." Still the point cannot be affirmed with certainty; for there were several earlier plays on the subject, and especially a Latin play on Cæsar's Death, which was performed at Oxford in 1582.

Mr. Collier argues that Shakespeare's play must have been on the stage before 1603, his reason being as follows. Drayton's *Mortimeriados* appeared in 1596. The poem was afterwards recast by the author, and published again in 1603 as *The Barons' Wars*. The recast has the following lines, which were not in the original form of the poem:

> "Such one he was, of him we boldly say,
> In whose rich soul all sovereign powers did suit;
> In whom in peace *the elements all lay*
> *So mix'd*, as none could sovereignty impute:
> That 't seem'd when Heaven his model first began,
> In him it show'd *perfection in a man*."

Here we have a striking resemblance to what Antony says of Brutus in the play:

> "His life was gentle, and *the elements*
> *So mix'd in him*, that Nature might stand up
> And say to all the world, *This was a man*."

Mr. Collier's theory is, that Drayton, before recasting his poem, had either seen the play in manuscript or heard it at the theatre, and so caught and copied the language of Shakespeare.

I confess there does not seem to me any great strength in this argument; for the idea and even the language of the resembling lines was so much a commonplace in the Poet's time, that no one could claim any special right of authorship in it. Nevertheless it is now pretty certain that the play was written as early as 1601, Mr. Halliwell having lately produced the following from Weever's *Mirror of Martyrs*, which was printed that year:

> "The many-headed multitude were drawn
> By Brutus' speech, that Cæsar was ambitious;
> When eloquent Mark Antony had shown
> His virtues, who but Brutus then was vicious?"

As there is nothing in the history that could have suggested this, we can only ascribe it to some acquaintance with the play: so that the passage may be justly regarded as decisive of the question.

The style alone of the drama led me to rest in about the same conclusion long ago. And I the rather make something of this matter, because it involves a good exercise of mind in discriminating the Poet's different styles; which is a very nice art indeed, and therefore apt to render the perceptions delicate and acute. It has been said that a true taste for Shakespeare is like the creation of a special sense; and this saying is nowhere better approved than in reference to his subtile variations of language and style. For he began with what may be described as a preponderance of the poetic element over the dramatic. As we trace his course onward, we may, I think, discover a gradual rising of the latter element into greater strength and prominence, until at last it had the former in complete subjection. Now, where positive external evidence is wanting, it is mainly from the relative strength of these elements that I argue the probable date of the writing. And it seems to me that in *Julius Cæsar* the diction is more gliding and continuous, and the imagery more round and amplified, than in the dramas known to have been of the Poet's latest period.

But these distinctive notes are of a nature to be more easily felt than described; and to make them felt examples will best serve. Take, then, a sentence from the soliloquy of Brutus just after he has pledged himself to the conspiracy:

> "'Tis a common proof,
> That lowliness is young ambition's ladder,
> Whereto the climber-upward turns his face;
> But, when he once attains the upmost round,
> He then unto the ladder turns his back,
> Looks in the clouds, scorning the base degrees
> By which he did ascend."

Here we have a full, rounded period in which all the elements seem to have been adjusted, and the whole expression set in order, before any part of it was written down. The beginning foresees the end, the end remembers the beginning, and the thought and image are evolved together in an even continuous flow. The thing is indeed perfect in its way, still it is not in Shakespeare's latest and highest style. Now compare with this a passage from *The Winter's Tale:*

> "When you speak, sweet,
> I'd have you do it ever: when you sing,
> I'd have you buy and sell so; so give alms;
> Pray so; and for the ordering your affairs,
> To sing them too: when you do dance, I wish you
> A wave o' the sea, that you might ever do
> Nothing but that; move still, still so, and own
> No other function."

Here the workmanship seems to make and shape itself as it goes along, thought kindling thought, and image prompting image, and each part neither concerning itself with what has gone before, nor what is coming after. The very sweetness has a certain piercing quality, and we taste it from clause to clause, almost from word to word, as so many keen darts of poetic rapture shot forth in rapid succession. Yet the passage, notwithstanding its swift changes of imagery and motion, is perfect in unity and continuity.

Such is, I believe, a fair illustration of what has long been familiar to me as the supreme excellence of Shakespeare's ripest, strongest, and most idiomatic style. *Antony and Cleopatra* is pre-eminently rich in this quality; but there is enough of it in *The Tempest*, *The Winter's Tale*, *Coriolanus*, and *Cymbeline*, to identify them as belonging to the same stage and period of authorship. But I can find hardly so much as an earnest of it in *Julius Cæsar;* and nothing short of very strong positive evidence would induce me to class this drama with those, as regards the time of writing.

The historic materials of this play were drawn from *The Life of Julius Cæsar*, *The Life of Marcus Brutus*, and *The Life of Marcus Antonius*, as set forth in Sir Thomas North's translation of Plutarch. This work, aptly described by Warton as "Shakespeare's storehouse of learned history," was first printed in 1579, and reprinted in 1595, 1603, and 1612, not to mention several later editions. The translation was avowedly made, not directly from the Greek, but from the French version of Jaques Amyot, Bishop of Auxerre. The book is among our richest and freshest literary monuments of that age; and, apart from the use made of it by Shakespeare, is in itself an invaluable repertory of honest, manly, idiomatic Elizabethan English.

No abstract, nor any extracts, of the Plutarchian matter can well be given here. Suffice it to say, that in most of the leading incidents the charming old Greek is minutely followed; though in divers cases those incidents are worked out with surpassing fertility of invention and art. But, besides this, in many places the Plutarchian form and order of thought, and also the very words of North's racy and delectable old English, are retained, with such an embalming for immortality as Shakespeare alone could give. — It may be well to add, that on the 13th of February, B.C. 44, the feast of Lupercalia was held, when the crown was offered to Cæsar by Antony. On the 15th of March following, Cæsar was slain. In November, B.C. 43, the Triumvirs, Octavius,

Antony, and Lepidus, met on a small island near Bononia, and there made up their bloody proscription. The overthrow of Brutus and Cassius near Philippi took place in the Fall of the next year. So that the events of the drama cover a period of something over two years and a half.

It has been justly observed that Shakespeare shows much judgment in the naming of his plays. From this observation, however, several critics, as Gildon and Schlegel, have excepted the play in hand, pronouncing the title a misnomer, on the ground that Brutus, and not Cæsar, is the hero of it. It is indeed true that Brutus is the hero; nevertheless I must insist upon it that the play is rightly named, inasmuch as Cæsar is not only the subject but also the governing power of it throughout. He is the centre and springhead of the entire action, giving law and shape to every thing that is said and done. This is manifestly true in what occurs before his death; and it is true in a still deeper sense afterwards, since his genius then becomes the Nemesis or retributive Providence, presiding over the whole course of the drama.

The characterization of this drama in some of the parts is, I confess, not a little perplexing to me. I do not feel quite sure as to the temper of mind in which the Poet conceived some of the persons, or why he should have given them the aspect they wear in the play. For instance, Cæsar is far from being himself in these scenes; hardly one of the speeches put into his mouth can be regarded as historically characteristic; taken all together, they are little short of a downright caricature. As here represented, he is indeed little better than a grand, strutting piece of puff-paste; and when he speaks, it is very much in the style of a glorious vapourer and braggart, full of lofty airs and mock-thunder; than which nothing could be further from the truth of the man, whose character, even in his faults, was as compact and solid as adamant, and at the same time as limber and

ductile as the finest gold. Certain critics have seized and worked upon this, as proving that Shakespeare must have been very green in classical study, or else very careless in the use of his authorities. To my thinking it proves neither the one nor the other.

It is true, Cæsar's ambition was indeed gigantic, but none too much so, I suspect, for the mind it dwelt in; for his character in all its features was gigantic. And no man ever framed his ambition more in sympathy with the great forces of Nature, or built it upon a deeper foundation of political wisdom and insight. Now this "last infirmity of noble minds" is the only part of him that the play really sets before us; and even this we do not see as it was, because it is here severed from the constitutional peerage of his gifts and virtues; all those transcendant qualities which placed him at the summit of Roman intellect and manhood being either withheld from the scene, or thrown so far into the background, that the proper effect of them is mainly lost.

Yet we have ample proof that Shakespeare understood Cæsar thoroughly; and that he regarded him as "the noblest man that ever livèd in the tide of times." For example, in *Hamlet*, he makes Horatio, who is one of his calmest and most right-thinking characters, speak of him as "the mightiest Julius." In *Antony and Cleopatra*, again, the heroine is made to describe him as "broad-fronted Cæsar." And in *King Richard the Third*, the young Prince utters these lines:

> "That Julius Cæsar was a famous man;
> With what his valour did enrich his wit,
> His wit set down to make his valour live:
> Death makes no conquest of this conqueror."

In fact, we need not go beyond Shakespeare to gather that Julius Cæsar's was the deepest, the most versatile, and most multitudinous head that ever figured in the political affairs of mankind.

Indeed, it is clear from this play itself that the Poet's course did not proceed at all from ignorance or misconcep-

tion of the man. For it is remarkable that, though Cæsar delivers himself so out of character, yet others, both foes and friends, deliver him much nearer the truth; so that, while we see almost nothing of him directly, we nevertheless get, upon the whole, a pretty just reflection of him. Especially, in the marvellous speeches of Antony and in the later events of the drama, both his inward greatness and his right of mastership over the Roman world are fully vindicated. For, in the play as in the history, Cæsar's blood just hastens and cements the empire which the conspirators thought to prevent. They soon find that in the popular sympathies, and even in their own dumb remorses, he has "left behind powers that will work for him." He proves indeed far mightier in death than in life; as if his spirit were become at once the guardian angel of his cause and an avenging angel to his foes.

And so it was in fact. For nothing did so much to set the people in love with royalty, both name and thing, as the reflection that their beloved Cæsar, the greatest of their national heroes, the crown and consummation of Roman genius and character, had been murdered for aspiring to it. Thus their hereditary aversion to kingship was all subdued by the remembrance of how and why their Cæsar fell; and they who, before, would have plucked out his heart rather than he should wear a crown, would now have plucked out their own, to set a crown upon his head. Such is the natural result when the intensities of admiration and compassion meet together in the human breast.

From all which it may well be thought that Cæsar was too great for the hero of a drama, since his greatness, if brought forward in full measure, would leave no room for any thing else, at least would preclude any proper dramatic balance and equipoise. It was only as a sort of underlying potency or a force withdrawn into the background, that his presence was compatible with that harmony and reciprocity of several characters which a well-ordered drama requires. At all events, it is pretty clear that, where he was, such

figures as Brutus and Cassius could never be very considerable, save as his assassins. They would not have been heard of in after-times, if they had not "struck the foremost man of all this world"; in other words, the great sun of Rome had to be shorn of his beams, else so ineffectual a fire as Brutus could nowise catch the eye.

Be this as it may, I have no doubt that Shakespeare knew the whole height and compass of Cæsar's vast and varied capacity. And I sometimes regret that he did not render him as he evidently saw him, inasmuch as he alone perhaps of all the men who ever wrote could have given an adequate expression of that colossal man.

I have sometimes thought that the policy of the drama may have been to represent Cæsar, not as he was indeed, but as he must have appeared to the conspirators; to make us see him as they saw him; in order that they too might have fair and equal judgment at our hands. For Cæsar was literally too great to be seen by them, save as children often see bugbears by moonlight, when their inexperienced eyes are mocked with air. And the poet may well have judged that the best way to set us right towards them was by identifying us more or less with them in mental position, and making us share somewhat in their delusion. For there is scarce any thing wherein we are so apt to err as in reference to the characters of men when time has settled and cleared up the questions in which they lost their way: we blame them for not having seen as we see; while, in truth, the things that are so bathed in light to us were full of darkness to them; and we should have understood them better, had we been in the dark along with them.

Cæsar indeed was not bewildered by the political questions of his time; but all the rest were, and therefore he seemed so to them; and while their own heads were swimming they naturally ascribed his seeming bewilderment to a dangerous intoxication. As for his marvellous career of success, they attributed this mainly to his good luck; such being the common refuge of inferior minds when they would

escape the sense of their inferiority. Hence, as generally happens with the highest order of men, his greatness had to wait the approval of later events. He indeed, far beyond any other man of his age, "looked into the seeds of time"; but this was not nor could be known, till time had developed those seeds into their fruits. Why, then, may not the Poet's idea have been, so to order things that the full strength of the man should not appear in the play, as it did not in fact, till after his fall? This view, I am apt to think, will both explain and justify the strange disguise — a sort of falsetto greatness — under which Cæsar exhibits himself.

Now the seeming contradiction between Cæsar as known and Cæsar as rendered by Shakespeare is what, more than any thing else in the drama, perplexes me. But there is, I think, a very refined, subtile, and peculiar irony pervading this, more than any other of the Poet's plays; not intended as such, indeed, by the speakers, but a sort of historic irony, — the irony of Providence, so to speak, or, if you please, of Fate; much the same as is implied in the proverb, "A haughty spirit goes before a fall." This irony crops out in many places. Thus we have Cæsar most blown with arrogance and godding it in the loftiest style when the daggers of the assassins are on the very point of leaping at him. So too, all along, we find Brutus most confident in those very things where he is most at fault, or acting like a man "most ignorant of what he's most assured"; as when he says that "Antony can do no more than Cæsar's arm when Cæsar's head is off." This, to be sure, is not meant ironically by him; but it is turned into irony by the fact that Antony soon tears the cause of the conspirators all to pieces with his tongue. But indeed this sort of honest guile runs all through the piece as a perfusive and permeating efficacy. A still better instance of it occurs just after the murder, when the chiefs of the conspiracy are exulting in the transcendant virtue and beneficence of their deed, and in its future stage celebrity; and Cassius says,

"So often shall the knot of us be call'd
The men that gave their country liberty;"

and again, a little later, when Brutus says of Antony, "I know that we shall have him well to friend." Not indeed that the men themselves thought any irony in those speeches; it was natural, no doubt, that they should utter such things in all seriousness; but what they say is interpreted into irony by the subsequent events. And when such a shallow idealist as Brutus is made to overtop and outshine the greatest practical genius the world ever saw, what is it but a refined and subtile irony at work on a much larger scale, and diffusing itself, secretly, it may be, but not the less vitally, into the texture? It was not the frog that thought irony, when he tried to make himself as big as the ox; but there was a pretty decided spice of irony in the mind that conceived the fable.

It is to be noted further, that Brutus uniformly speaks of Cæsar with respect, almost indeed with admiration. It is his ambition, not his greatness, that Brutus resents; the thought that his own consequence is impaired by Cæsar's elevation having no influence with him. With Cassius, on the contrary, impatience of his superiority is the ruling motive: he is all the while thinking of the disparagement he suffers by Cæsar's exaltation.

"This man
Is now become a god; and Cassius is
A wretched creature, and must bend his body,
If Cæsar carelessly but nod on him."

"Why, man, he doth bestride the narrow world
Like a Colossus; and we petty men
Walk under his huge legs."

Thus he overflows with mocking comparisons, and finds his pastime in flouting at Cæsar as having managed, by a sham heroism, to hoodwink the world.

And yet the Poet makes Cæsar characterize himself very much as Cassius, in his splenetic temper, describes him.

Cæsar gods it in his talk, as if on purpose to approve the style in which Cassius mockingly gods him. This, taken by itself, would look as if the Poet sided with Cassius; yet one can hardly help feeling that he sympathized rather in Antony's great oration. And the sequel, as we have seen, justifies Antony's opinion of Cæsar. Thus, it seems to me, the subsequent course of things has the effect of inverting the mockery of Cassius against himself; as much as to say, "You have made fine work with your ridding the world of great Cæsar: since your daggers pricked the gas out of him, you see what a grand humbug he was!"

In sober truth, the final issue of the conspiracy, as represented by Shakespeare, is a pretty conclusive argument of the blunder, not to say the crime, of its authors. Cæsar, dead, tears them and their cause all to pieces. In effect, they did but stab him into a mightier life; so that Brutus might well say, as indeed he does at last,

> "O Julius Cæsar, thou art mighty yet!
> Thy spirit walks abroad, and turns our swords
> In our own proper entrails."

Am I wrong, then, in regarding the Nemesis which asserts itself so sternly in the latter part of the play, as a reflex of irony on some of the earlier scenes? I the rather take this view, inasmuch as it infers the disguise of Cæsar to be an instance of the profound guile with which Shakespeare sometimes plays upon his characters, humouring their bent, and then leaving them to the discipline of events.*

* Julius Cæsar is indeed protagonist of the tragedy; but it is not the Cæsar whose bodily presence is weak, whose mind is declining in strength and sure-footed energy, — the Cæsar who stands exposed to all the accidents of fortune. It is the spirit of Cæsar which is the dominant power of the tragedy: against this — the spirit of Cæsar — Brutus fought; but Brutus, who for ever errs in practical politics, succeeded only in striking down Cæsar's body: he who had been weak now rises as pure spirit, strong and terrible, and avenges himself upon the conspirators. The contrast between the weakness of Cæsar's bodily presence in the first half of the play, and the might of his spiritual presence in the latter half, is emphasized and perhaps

Merivale justly affirms Julius Cæsar to be "the greatest name in history." And I believe the general verdict of mankind pronounces him at once the greatest soldier and the greatest statesman of the world. In oratory, also, he is acknowledged to have stood second only to Cicero at the time; while, as an author, he ranks among the best and highest of our Latin classics. Therewithal he was a perfect gentleman; and of the world's great military conquerors he is probably the only one to whom that title can be justly applied. All the sweetness of humanity seems to have been concentrated in his native temper and disposition. Nor were his virtues less eminent than his talents and genius; while the immense power to which he attained served, apparently, but to give his virtues larger scope and render them more conspicuous: so that his rightful seat is among the loveliest, the largest-hearted, the most magnanimous of men.

Julius Cæsar loved Rome, too, at least as well as any of his haters did, and loved her a thousand times more wisely. But it was his peculiar lot, perhaps I should rather say his special mission, to contend — alone and single-handed in the fore-front, though, to be sure, with the great body of the Roman people at his back — with the proudest, the powerfullest, and the wickedest oligarchy that ever afflicted the world. This senatorial faction, small in number, but terrible in malignant activity, were, and long had been, intent on prostituting all the powers of the Roman State to their own base, selfish, sinister ends: with a few individual exceptions, they seemed to cherish the illustrious traditions

over-emphasized by Shakespeare. It was the error of Brutus that he failed to perceive wherein lay the true Cæsarean power, and acted with short-sighted eagerness and violence. Mark Antony, over the dead body of his lord, announces what is to follow: "Over thy wounds now do I prophesy," &c. The ghost of Cæsar, which appears on the night before the battle of Philippi, serves as a kind of visible symbol of the vast posthumous power of the Dictator. Finally, the little effort of the aristocrat republicans sinks to the ground, foiled and crushed by the force which they had hoped to abolish by one violent blow. — DOWDEN.

of their country only as a license for their atrocious cupidity and lust. They could not be made to comprehend that either the foreign nations whom they conquered or the other classes of their own nation had any rights which they were bound to respect: practically at least, as the thing stood to their mind, all other men were created but for the one sole purpose that they might fleece them, plunder them, prey upon them. And they, they it was who were slowly murdering the liberties and the Constitution of their country, by their hideous corruption, avarice, profligacy, rapacity, inhumanity. From the very outset of his public career, Cæsar deliberately set his whole mind and bent all his matchless energies to the work of rescuing so much of the liberty and Constitution of old Rome as it was yet possible to save from the stanchless greed, the remorseless tyranny, the monstrous sensuality, which were rendering the Roman name an intolerable stench in the nostrils of Heaven and Earth. Such as they were, Cæsar wrestled with them many a long year, till he finally outwrestled and overthrew them, and thereby delivered the groaning nations from their dreadful misrule. When they could no longer meet him in open fight, they found him as wise and merciful in peace as he had been heroic and irresistible in war; so that no means were left them for putting him down but those which they used at last, — smiles concealing daggers, kisses, to make way for stabs.

In the process of his work, this mighty man approved himself to be in no sort a philosophic enthusiast or patriotic dreamer. With his clear, healthy, practical mind, which no ideal or sentimental infatuation could get hold of, he stood face to face with men and things as they were. It was not in his line therefore to bid old "Time run back and fetch the age of gold." He knew — he would not have been Julius Cæsar if he had not known — that it was both criminal and weak to suppose that the great wicked Rome of his day was to be crushed back into the smaller and better Rome of a bygone age. If he sought to imperialize the State, and

himself at its head, it was because he knew that Rome, as she then was, must have a master, and that himself was the fittest man for that office. We can all now see, what he alone saw then, that the great social and political forces of the Roman world had long been moving and converging irresistibly to that end. He was not to be deluded with the hope of reversing or postponing the issue of such deep-working causes. The great danger of the time lay in struggling to keep up a republic in show, when they already had an empire in fact. And Cæsar's statesmanship was of that high and comprehensive reach which knows better than to outface political necessities with political theories. For it is an axiom in government, no less than in science, that Nature will not be the servant of men who are too brain-sick or too proud to perceive and respect her laws. The only mode of inducing her powers to work for us is by learning their terms and letting them have their own way. There is nothing in which this holds more true than in respect of those vast moral energies which evolve and shape the life of States and empires, and which no conscious power of man can arrest, because their working is so deep and silent as not to be known, till the results are fully prepared. Here, indeed, man's best strength is a confession of his impotence. Great Cæsar understood this matter thoroughly in reference to the political state of his time; and his ambition, if that be the right name for it, was but the instinct of a supreme administrative faculty for administrative modes and powers answerable to the exigency. The most sagacious and far-seeing of political reformers, he was also, his enemies themselves being judges, the most gentle and benignant of civil rulers. Great faults he had indeed, measured by our standard; but his worst vices were, in all rational and human account, preferable to the best *public* virtues of his stabbers.

As the foregoing view of Cæsar and his assassins does not tally at all points with the one commonly held, and as it may appear to some rather paradoxical, I subjoin the

judgments of two learned and judicious authors, to show that I am not altogether singular. The first is from Merivale's *History of the Romans under the Empire:*

"While other illustrious men have been reputed great for their excellence in some one department of human genius, it was declared by the concurrent voice of antiquity, that Cæsar was excellent in all. He had genius, understanding, memory, taste, reflection, industry, and exactness. 'He was great,' repeats a modern writer, 'in every thing he undertook; as a captain, a statesman, a lawgiver, a jurist, an orator, a poet, an historian, a grammarian, a mathematician, and an architect.' The secret of his manifold excellence was discovered by Pliny in the unparalleled energy of his intellectual powers, which he could devote without distraction to several objects at once, or rush at any moment from one occupation to another with the abruptness and rapidity of lightning. Cæsar could be writing and reading, dictating and listening, all at the same time; he was wont to occupy four amanuenses at once; and had been known, on occasions, to employ as many as seven together. And, as if to complete the picture of the most perfect specimen of human ability, we are assured that in all the exercises of the camp his vigour and skill were not less conspicuous. He fought at the most perilous moments in the ranks of the soldiers; he could manage his charger without the use of reins; and he saved his life at Alexandria by his address in the art of swimming."

The following is from a recent history of Rome by Dr. Leonard Schmitz, of Edinburgh:

"The death of Cæsar was an irreparable loss, not only to the Roman people, but to the whole civilized world; for the Republic was utterly ruined, and no earthly power could restore it. Cæsar's death involved the State in fresh struggles and civil wars for many a year, until in the end it fell again (and this was the best that, under the circumstances, could have happened to it) under the supremacy of Augustus, who had neither the talent, nor the will, nor the power, to carry out all the beneficial plans which his great-uncle had formed. It has been truly said, that the murder of Cæsar was the most senseless act the Romans ever committed. Had it been possible at all to restore the Republic, it would unavoidably have fallen into the hands of a most profligate aristoc-

racy, who would have sought nothing but their own aggrandizement; would have demoralized the people still more; and would have established their own greatness upon the ruins of their country. It is only necessary to recollect the latter years of the Republic, the depravity and corruption of the ruling classes, the scenes of violence and bloodshed which constantly occurred in the streets of Rome, to render it evident to every one that peace and security could not be restored, except by the strong hand of a sovereign; and the Roman world would have been fortunate indeed, if it had submitted to the mild and beneficent sway of Cæsar."

Coleridge has a shrewd doubt as to what sort of a character the Poet meant his Brutus to be. For, in his thinking aloud just after the breaking of the conspiracy to him, Brutus avowedly grounds his purpose, not on any thing Cæsar has done, nor on what he is, but simply on what he *may become* when crowned. He "knows no personal cause to spurn at him"; nor has he "known when his affections sway'd more than his reason"; but "he would be crown'd: how that might change his nature, there's the question"; and,

> "since the quarrel
> Will bear no colour for the thing he is,
> Fashion it thus, — that what he is, augmented,
> Would run to these and these extremities;
> And therefore think him as a serpent's egg,
> And kill him in the shell."

So then, Brutus heads a plot to assassinate the man who, besides being clothed with the sanctions of law as the highest representative of the State, has been his personal friend and benefactor; all this, too, not on any ground of fact, but on an assumed probability that the crown will prove a sacrament of evil, and transform him into quite another man. A strange piece of casuistry indeed! but nowise unsuited to the spirit of a man who was to commit the gravest of crimes, purely from a misplaced virtue.

And yet the character of Brutus is full of beauty and sweetness. In all the relations of life he is upright, gentle,

and pure; of a sensitiveness and delicacy of principle that cannot bosom the slightest stain; his mind enriched and fortified with the best extractions of philosophy; a man adorned with all the virtues which, in public and private, at home and in the circle of friends, win respect and charm the heart.

Being such a man, of course he could only do what he did under some sort of delusion. And so indeed it is. Yet this very delusion serves, apparently, to ennoble and beautify him, as it takes him and works upon him through his virtues. At heart he is a real patriot, every inch of him. But his patriotism, besides being somewhat hide-bound with patrician pride, is of the speculative kind, and dwells, where his whole character has been chiefly formed, in a world of poetical and philosophic ideals. He is an enthusiastic student of books. Plato is his favourite teacher; and he has studiously framed his life and tuned his thoughts to the grand and pure conceptions won from that all but divine source: Plato's genius walks with him in the Senate, sits with him at the fireside, goes with him to the wars, and still hovers about his tent.

His great fault, then, lies in supposing it his duty to be meddling with things that he does not understand. Conscious of high thoughts and just desires, but with no gift of practical insight, he is ill fitted to "grind among the iron facts of life." In truth, he does not really see where he is; the actual circumstances and tendencies amidst which he lives are as a book written in a language he cannot read. The characters of those who act with him are too far below the region of his principles and habitual thinkings for him to take the true cast of them. Himself incapable of such motives as govern them, he just projects and suspends his ideals in them, and then misreckons upon them as realizing the men of his own brain. So, also, he clings to the idea of the great and free republic of his fathers, the old Rome that has ever stood to his feelings touched with the consecrations of time, and glorified with the high virtues that have grown

up under her cherishing. But, in the long reign of tearing faction and civil butchery, that which he worships has been substantially changed, the reality lost. Cæsar, already clothed with the title and the power of Imperator for life, would change the form so as to agree with the substance, the name so as to fit the thing. But Brutus is so filled with the idea of that which has thus passed away never to return, that he thinks to save or recover the whole by preventing such formal and nominal change.

And so his whole course is that of one acting on his own ideas, not on the facts that are before and around him. Indeed he does not *see* them; he merely dreams his own meaning into them. He is swift to do that by which he thinks his country *ought to be benefited*. As the killing of Cæsar stands in his purpose, he and his associates are to be "sacrificers, not butchers." But, in order to any such effect as he hopes for, his countrymen generally must regard the act in the same light as he intends it. That they will do this, is the very thing which he has *in fact* no reason to conclude; nothwithstanding, because it is so *in his idea*, therefore he trusts that the conspirators will "be called purgers, not murderers." Meanwhile the plain truth is, that, if his countrymen had been capable of regarding the deed as a sacrifice, they would not have made nor permitted any occasion for it. It is certain that unless so construed the act must prove fruitful of evil: all Rome is full of things proving that it cannot be so construed; but this is what Brutus has no eye to see.

So too, in his oration "to show the *reason* of our Cæsar's death," he speaks, in calm and dispassionate manner, just those things which he thinks ought to set the people right, and himself right in their eyes; forgetting all the while that the deed cannot fail to make the people mad, and that popular madness is not a thing to be reasoned with. And for the same cause he insists on sparing Antony, and on permitting him to speak in Cæsar's funeral. To do otherwise would be unjust, and so would overthrow the whole nature

of the enterprise as it lives in his mind. And, because in his idea it ought so to be, he trusts that Antony will make Cæsar's death the occasion of strengthening those who killed him; not perceiving the strong likelihood, which soon passes into a fact, than in cutting off Cæsar they have taken away the only check on Antony's ambition. He ought to have foreseen that Antony, instead of being drawn to their side, would rather make love to Cæsar's place at their expense.

Thus the course of Brutus serves no end but to set on foot another civil war, which naturally hastens and assures the very thing he sought to prevent. He confides in the goodness of his cause, not considering that, the better the cause, the worse its chance with bad men. He thinks it safe to trust others, because he knows they can safely trust him; the singleness of his own eye causing him to believe that others will see as he sees, the purity of his own heart, that others will feel as he feels.

Here then we have a strong instance of a very good man doing a very bad thing; and, withal, of a wise man acting most unwisely, because his wisdom knew not its place; a right-noble, just, heroic spirit bearing directly athwart the virtues he worships. On the whole, it is not wonderful that Brutus should have exclaimed, as he is said to have done, that he had worshipped Virtue, and found her at last but a shade. So worshipped, she may well prove a shade indeed! Admiration of the man's character, reprobation of his proceedings, — which of these is the stronger with us? And there is, I think, much the same irony in the representation of Brutus as in that of Cæsar; only the order of it is here reversed. As if one should say, "O yes, yes! in the practical affairs of mankind your charming wisdom of the closet will doubtless put to shame the workings of mere practical insight and sagacity."

Shakespeare's exactness in the minutest details of character is well shown in the speech already referred to; which is the utterance of a man philosophizing most unphilosophically; as if the Academy should betake itself to

the stump, and this too without any sense of the incongruity. Plutarch has a short passage which served as a hint, not indeed for the matter, but for the style of that speech. "They do note," says he, "that in some of his epistles he counterfeited that brief compendious manner of the Lacedæmonians. As, when the war was begun, he wrote to the Pergamenians in this sort: 'I understand you have given Dolabella money: if you have done it willingly, you confess you have offended me; if against your wills, show it by giving me willingly.' This was Brutus's manner of letters, which were honoured for their briefness." The speech in question is far enough indeed from being a model of style either for oratory or any thing else; but it is finely characteristic; while its studied primness and epigrammatic finish contrast most unfavorably with the frank-hearted yet artful eloquence of Antony.

And what a rare significance attaches to the brief scene of Brutus and his drowsy boy Lucius in camp a little before the catastrophe! There, in the deep of the night, long after all the rest have lost themselves in sleep, and when the anxieties of the issue are crowding upon him, — there we have the earnest, thoughtful Brutus hungering intensely for the repasts of treasured thought:

> "Look, Lucius, here's the book I sought for so;
> I put it in the pocket of my gown."

What the man is, and where he ought to be, is all signified in these two lines. And do we not taste a dash of benignant irony in the implied repugnance between the spirit of the man and the stuff of his present undertaking? The idea of a bookworm riding the whirlwind of war! The thing is most like Brutus; but how out of his element, how unsphered from his right place, it shows him! There is a touch of drollery in the contrast, which the richest steeping of poetry does not disguise. I fancy the Poet to have been in a bland intellectual smile, as he wrote that strain of loving earnestness in which the matter is delivered. And

the irony is all the more delectable for being so remote and unpronounced; like one of those choice arrangements in the background of a painting, which, without attracting conscious notice, give a zest and relish to what stands in front. The scene, whether for charm of sentiment or felicity of conception, is one of the finest in Shakespeare. Here too he had a hint from Plutarch: "Whilst Brutus was in the war, and his head over-busily occupied, having slumbered a little after supper, he spent the rest of the night in dispatching his weightiest causes; and, if he had any leisure left, he would read some book till the third watch of the night." I must add a part of what Brutus says when Lucius falls asleep in the midst of his song:

> "This is a sleepy tune. — O murderous slumber!
> Lay'st thou thy leaden mace upon my boy
> That plays thee music? — Gentle knave, good night;
> I will not do thee so much wrong to wake thee:
> If thou dost nod, thou break'st thy instrument;
> I'll take it from thee; and, good boy, good night. —
> Let me see, let me see: is not the leaf turn'd down,
> Where I left reading? Here it is, I think."

It is but right to add that, in the war between Pompey and Cæsar, Brutus, after much vacillation, sided with the former; and, when Pompey's cause was wrecked at Pharsalia, he was one of the first to throw himself on Cæsar's clemency; who thereupon took him to his bosom; thus behaving with that mixture of far-sightedness and kind-heartedness which is rightly called magnanimity; and as thinking it nobler to charm the hostility out of his enemies than to make them feel his power. These facts, to be sure, are not brought forward in the play, but the sense of them is; and this too in a way that tells powerfully against the course of Brutus.

Such, to my apprehension, is the Brutus of Shakespeare. But the Brutus of history was neither so immaculate in purpose nor so amiable in temper as the Poet's delineation may lead us to suppose. Merivale has the following in reference to him:

"He was the son of a father of the same name, who had been a prominent supporter of the Marian party, and finally lost his life by rashly joining in the enterprise of Lepidus. His mother Servilia was half-sister to Marcus Cato, and appears to have been a woman of strong character and more than usual attainments. He was born only fifteen years later than Cæsar himself. But Cæsar's intimacy with Servilia was, it may be presumed, a principal cause of the marked favour with which he distinguished her offspring.

"The elder Brutus being cut off prematurely, when his son was only eight years of age, the care of his education passed into the hands of his uncle Cato; and the youth became early initiated in the maxims of the Stoic philosophy, and learned to regard his preceptor, whose daughter Portia he married, as the purest model of practical and abstract virtue. But, together with many honourable and noble sentiments, he imbibed also from him that morose strictness in the exaction as well as the discharge of legal obligations which, while it is often mistaken for a guaranty of probity, is not incompatible with actual laxity of principle.

"Accordingly, we find that while, on the one hand, he refrained as a provincial officer from extorting by fraud or violence the objects of his cupidity, he was, on the other, not the less unscrupulous in demanding exorbitant interest for loans advanced to the natives, and enforcing payment with rigid pertinacity. He allowed his agent to urge the most questionable interpretations of the law, and to enforce a rate of interest beyond what Cicero considered either legal or equitable. The bitter reflections which Cicero makes upon the conduct of Brutus mark the strong contrast between the tried and practical friend of virtue and the pedantic aspirant to philosophic renown."

The characters of Brutus and Cassius are very nicely discriminated, scarce a word falling from either but what smacks of the man. Cassius is much the better conspirator, but much the worse man; and the better in that because the worse in this. For Brutus engages in the conspiracy on grounds of abstract and ideal justice; while Cassius holds it both a wrong and a blunder to go about such a thing without making success his first care. This, accordingly, is what he works for, being reckless of all

other considerations in his choice and use of means. Withal he is more impulsive and quick than Brutus, because less under the self-discipline of moral principle. His motives, too, are of a much more mixed and various quality, because his habits of thinking and acting have grown by the measures of experience: he studies to understand men as they are; Brutus, as he thinks they ought to be. Hence, in every case where Brutus crosses him, Brutus is wrong, and he is right, — right, that is, if success be their aim. Cassius judges, and rightly, I think, that the end should give law to the means; and that "the honourable men whose daggers have stabb'd Cæsar" should not be hampered with conscientious scruples.

Still Brutus overawes him by his moral energy and elevation of character, and by the open-faced rectitude and purity of his principles. Brutus has no thoughts or aims that he is afraid or ashamed to avow; Cassius has many which he would fain hide even from himself. And he catches a sort of inspiration and is raised above himself by contact with Brutus. And Cassius, moreover, acts very much from personal hatred of Cæsar, as remembering how, not long before, he and Brutus had stood for the chief Prætorship of the city, and Brutus through Cæsar's favour had got the election. And so the Poet read in Plutarch that "Cassius being a choleric man, and hating Cæsar privately more than he did the tyranny openly, incensed Brutus against him." The effect of this is finely worked out by the Poet in the man's affected scorn of Cæsar, and in the scoffing humour in which he loves to speak of him. For such is the natural language of a masked revenge.

The tone of Cassius is further indicated, and with exquisite art, in his soliloquy where, after tempering Brutus to his purpose, and finding how his "honourable metal may be wrought," he gently slurs him for being practicable to flatteries, and then proceeds to ruminate the scheme for working upon his vanity, and thereby drawing him into the conspiracy; thus spilling the significant fact, that his

own honour does not stick to practise the arts by which he thinks it is a shame to be seduced.

It is a noteworthy point also, that Cassius is too practical and too much of a politician to see any ghosts. Acting on far lower principles than his leader, and such as that leader would spurn as both wicked and base, he therefore does no violence to his heart in screwing it to the work he takes in hand: his heart is even more at home in the work than his head: whereas Brutus, from the wrenching his heart has suffered, keeps reverting to the moral complexion of his first step. The remembrance of this is a thorn in his side; while Cassius has no sensibilities of nature for such compunctions to stick upon. Brutus is never thoroughly himself after the assassination: that his heart is ill at ease, is shown in a certain dogged tenacity of honour and overstraining of rectitude, as if he were struggling to make atonement with his conscience. The stab he gave Cæsar planted in his own upright and gentle nature a germ of remorse, which, gathering strength from every subsequent adversity, came to embody itself in imaginary sights and sounds; the Spirit of Justice, made an ill angel to him by his own sense of wrong, hovering in the background of his after-life, and haunting his solitary moments in the shape of Cæsar's ghost. And so it is well done, that he is made to see the "monstrous apparition" just after his heart has been pierced through with many sorrows at hearing of Portia's shocking death.

The delineation of Portia is completed in a few brief masterly strokes. Once seen, the portrait ever after lives an old and dear acquaintance of the reader's inner man. Like some women I have known, Portia has strength enough to do and suffer for others, but very little for herself. As the daughter of Cato and the wife of Brutus, she has set in her eye a pattern of how she ought to think and act, being "so father'd and so husbanded"; but still her head floats merged over the ears in her heart; and it is only when

affection speaks that her spirit is hushed into the listening which she would fain yield only to the speech of reason. She has a clear idea of the stoical calmness and fortitude which appear so noble and so graceful in her Brutus; it all lies faithfully reproduced in her mind: she knows well how to honour and admire it; yet she cannot work it into the texture of her character; she can talk it like a book, but she tries in vain to live it.

Plutarch gives one most touching incident respecting her which the Poet did not use, though he transfused the sense of it into his work. It occurred some time after Cæsar's death, and when the civil war was growing to a head: "Brutus, seeing the state of Rome would be utterly overthrown, went to the city of Elea standing by the sea. There Portia, being ready to depart from her husband and return to Rome, did what she could to dissemble the sorrow she felt. But a certain painting bewrayed her in the end. The device was taken out of the Greek stories, how Andromache accompanied her husband Hector when he went out of Troy to the wars, and how Hector delivered her his little son, and how her eyes were never off him. Portia, seeing this picture, and likening herself to be in the same case, fell a-weeping; and, coming thither oftentimes in a day to see it, she wept still." The force of this incident is indeed all reproduced in the Portia of the play: we have its full effect in the matter about her self-inflicted wound as compared with her subsequent demeanour; still I cannot help wishing the Poet had made use of the incident itself.

Portia gives herself that gash without flinching, and bears it without a murmur, as an exercise and proof of manly fortitude; and she translates her pains into smiles, all to comfort and support her husband. So long as this purpose lends her strength, she is fully equal to her thought, because here her heart keeps touch perfectly with her head. But, this motive gone, the weakness, if it be not rather the strength, of her woman's nature rushes full upon her; her feelings rise into an uncontrollable flutter, and

run out at every joint and motion of her body; and nothing can arrest the inward mutiny till affection again whispers her into composure, lest she spill something that may hurt or endanger her Brutus. O noble Portia! Well might the poet Campbell say, "For the picture of that wedded pair, at once august and tender, human nature and the dignity of conjugal faith are indebted."

A rounded analysis of Antony belongs to a later period, when his native aptitudes for vice were warmed into full development by the charms of the great Egyptian sorceress; and only a few of his points as set forth in this play call for present notice. His unreserved adulation of Cæsar, and reckless purveying to Cæsar's dangerous weakness in craving to be called a king when he already had far more than kingly power, and while the obvious part of a friend was to warn him from it and help him against it, — this is wisely retained by the Poet as one of Antony's characteristic traits. Then too we have apt indications here and there of his proneness to those vicious levities and debasing luxuries which afterwards ripened into such a gigantic profligacy. He has not yet attained to that rank and full-blown combination of cruelty, perfidy, and voluptuousness, which the world associates with his name, but he is plainly on the way to it. His profound and wily dissimulation, while knitting up the hollow truce with the assassins on the very spot where "great Cæsar fell," is managed with admirable skill; his deep spasms of grief being worked out in just the right way to quench their suspicions, and make them run into the toils when he calls on them to render him their bloody hands. Nor have they any right to complain, for he is but paying them in their own coin; and we think none the worse of him, that he fairly outdoes them at their own practice.

But Antony's worst parts as here delivered are his exultant treachery in proposing to use his colleague Lepidus as at once the pack-horse and the scape-goat of the Triumvi-

rate, and his remorseless savagery in arranging for the slaughter of all that was most illustrious in Rome, bartering away his own uncle, to glut his revenge with the blood of Cicero; though even here his revenge was less hideous than the cold-blooded policy of young Octavius. Yet Antony has in the play, as he had in fact, some right-noble streaks in him; for his character was a very mixed one; and there was to the last a fierce war of good and evil within him. Especially he had an eye to see, a heart to feel, and a soul to honour the superb structure of manhood which Rome possessed in Julius Cæsar, who stood to him indeed as a kind of superior nature, to raise him above himself. He "fear'd Cæsar, honour'd him, and loved him"; and this religious gravitation towards him was honourable to them both. Antony's usual style of oratory is said to have been rather of the bloated and gassy sort; yet, with the murdered Cæsar for his theme, he was for once inspired and kindled to a rapture of the truest, noblest, most overwhelming eloquence; his actual performance being hardly exaggerated by the oration Shakespeare puts in his mouth. Nor must I omit the grateful remembrance at last of his obligations to Brutus for having saved him from the daggers of the conspirators.

That many-headed, but withal big-souled creature, the multitude, is charmingly characterized in these scenes. It is true, they are rather easily swayed hither and thither by the contagion of sympathy and of persuasive speech; yet their feelings are in the main right, and even their judgment in the long run is better than that of the pampered Roman aristocracy, inasmuch as it proceeds more from the instincts of manhood. Shakespeare evidently loved to play with the natural, unsophisticated, though somewhat childish heart of the people; but his playing is always genial and human-hearted, with a certain angelic humour in it that seldom fails to warm us towards the subject. On the whole, he understood the people well, and they have well repaid him in un-

derstanding him better, I suspect, than the critics have done. The cobbler's droll humour, at the opening of this play, followed as it is by a strain of the loftiest poetry, is aptly noted by Campbell as showing that the Poet, "even in dealing with classical subjects, laughed at the classic fear of putting the ludicrous and sublime into juxtaposition."

As a whole, this play is several degrees inferior to *Coriolanus*. Admirable as is the characterization, regarded individually, still, in respect of dramatic composition, the play does not, to my mind, stand among the Poet's masterpieces. But it abounds in particular scenes and passages fraught with the highest virtue of his genius. Among these may be specially mentioned the second scene of the first Act, where Cassius lays the egg of the conspiracy in Brutus's mind, warmed with such a wrappage of instigation as to assure its being quickly hatched. Also, the first scene of the second Act, unfolding the birth of the conspiracy, and winding up with the interview, so charged with domestic glory, of Brutus and Portia. The oration of Antony in Cæsar's funeral is such an interfusion of art and passion as realizes the very perfection of its kind. Adapted at once to the comprehension of the lowest mind and to the delectation of the highest, and running its pathos into the very quick of them that hear it, it tells with terrible effect on the people; and when it is done we feel that Cæsar's bleeding wounds are mightier than ever his genius and fortune were. The quarrel of Brutus and Cassius is deservedly celebrated. Dr. Johnson thought it, "somewhat cold and unaffecting." Coleridge thought otherwise. "I know," says he, "no part of Shakespeare that more impresses on me the belief of his genius being superhuman than this scene." I am content to err with Coleridge here, if it be an error. But there is nothing in the play that seems to me more divinely touched than the brief scene, already noticed, of Brutus and his boy Lucius. And what a dear little fellow Lucius is! so gentle, so dutiful, so loving, so thoughtful and careful

for his master; and yet himself no more conscious of his virtue than a flower of its fragrance. His falling asleep in the midst of his song, and his exclaiming on being aroused, "The strings, my lord, are false," are so good that I cannot speak of them.

HAMLET, PRINCE OF DENMARK.

"The Revenge of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark, as it was lately acted by the Lord Chamberlain's Servants," was registered at the Stationers' on the 26th of July, 1602. This entry undoubtedly refers to Shakespeare's tragedy, and is the first we hear of it. The tragedy was printed in 1603. It was printed again in 1604; and in the title-page of that issue we have the words, "enlarged to almost as much again as it was." This latter edition was reprinted in 1605, and again in 1611; besides an undated quarto, which is commonly referred to 1607, as it was entered at the Stationers' in the Fall of that year. These are all the issues known to have been made before the play reappeared in the folio of 1623. The quartos, all but the first, have a number of highly important passages that are not in the folio; while, on the other hand, the folio has a few, less important, that are wanting in the quartos.

It is generally agreed that the first issue was piratical. It gives the play but about half as long as the later quartos, and carries in its face abundant evidence of having been greatly marred and disfigured in the making-up. Dyce says, "It seems certain that in the quarto of 1603 we have Shakespeare's first conception of the play, though with a text mangled and corrupted throughout, and perhaps formed on the notes of some short-hand writer, who had imperfectly taken it down during representation." Nevertheless it is evident that the play was very different then from what it afterwards became. Polonius is there called Corambis, and

his man Reynaldo is called Montano. Divers scenes and passages, some of them such as a reporter would be least likely to omit, are wanting altogether. The Queen is represented as concerting and actively co-operating with Hamlet against the King's life; and she has an interview of considerable length with Horatio, who informs her of Hamlet's escape from the ship bound for England, and of his safe return to Denmark; of which scene the later issues have no traces whatever. All this fully ascertains the play to have undergone a thorough recasting from what it was when the copy of 1603 was taken.

A good deal of question has been made as to the time when the tragedy was first written. It is all but certain that the subject was done into a play some years before Shakespeare took it in hand, as we have notices to that effect reaching as far back as 1589. That play, however, is lost; and our notices of it give no clue to the authorship. On the other hand, there appears no good reason for believing that any form of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* was in being long before we hear of it as entered at the Stationers', in 1602.

Whether, or how far, Shakespeare may have borrowed his materials from any pre-existing play on the subject, we have no means of knowing. The tragedy was partly founded on a work by Saxo Grammaticus, a Danish historian, written as early as 1204, but not printed till 1514. The incidents, as related by him, were borrowed by Belleforest, through whose French version, probably, the tale found its way to the English stage. It was called *The History of Hamblet*. As there told, the story is, both in matter and style, uncouth and barbarous in the last degree; a savage, shocking tale of lust and murder, unredeemed by a single touch of art or fancy in the narrator. The scene of the incidents is laid before the introduction of Christianity into Denmark, and when the Danish power held sway in England: further than this the time is not specified. A

close sketch of such parts of the tale as were specially drawn upon for the play is all I have room for.

Roderick, King of Denmark, divided his kingdom into provinces, and placed governors in them. Among these were two warlike brothers, Horvendile and Fengon. The greatest honour that men of noble birth could at that time win was by piracy, wherein Horvendile surpassed all others. Collere, King of Norway, was so moved by his fame that he challenged him to fight, body to body; and the challenge was accepted, the victor to have all the riches that were in the other's ship. Collere was slain; and Horvendile returned home with much treasure, most of which he sent to King Roderick, who thereupon gave him his daughter Geruth in marriage. Of this marriage sprang Hamblet, the hero of the tale.

Fengon became so envious of his brother, that he resolved to kill him. Before doing this, he corrupted his wife, whom he afterwards married. Young Hamblet, thinking he was likely to fare no better than his father, went to feigning himself mad. One of Fengon's friends suspected his madness to be feigned, and counselled Fengon to use some crafty means for discovering his purpose. The plot being all laid, the counsellor went into the Queen's chamber, and hid behind the hangings. Soon after, the Queen and the Prince came in; but the latter, suspecting some treachery, kept up his counterfeit of madness, and went to beating with his arms upon the hangings. Feeling something stir under them, he cried, "A rat, a rat!" and thrust his sword into them; which done, he pulled the man out half dead, and made an end of him. He then has a long interview with his mother, which ends in a pledge of mutual confidence between them. She engages to keep his secret faithfully, and to aid him in his purpose of revenge; swearing that she had often prevented his death, and that she had never consented to the murder of his father.

Fengon's next device was to send the Prince to England, with secret letters to have him there put to death. Two of

his Ministers being sent along with him, the Prince, again suspecting mischief, when they were at sea read their commission while they were asleep, and substituted one requiring the bearers to be hanged. All this and much more being done, he returned to Denmark, and there executed his revenge in a manner horrid enough.

There is, besides, an episodical passage in the tale, from which the Poet probably took some hints, especially in the hero's melancholy mood, and his apprehension that "the spirit he has seen may be the Devil." I condense a portion of it: "In those days the northern parts of the world, living then under Satan's laws, were full of enchanters, so that there was not any young gentleman that knew not something therein. And so Hamblet had been instructed in that devilish art whereby the wicked spirit abuseth mankind. It toucheth not the matter herein to discover the parts of divination in man, and whether this Prince, by reason of his over-great melancholy, had received those impressions, divining that which never any had before declared." The "impressions" here spoken of refer to the means whereby Hamblet found out the secret of his father's murder.

It is hardly needful to add that Shakespeare makes the persons Christians, clothing them with the sentiments and manners of a much later period than they have in the tale; though he still places the scene at a time when England paid some sort of homage to the Danish crown; which was before the Norman Conquest. Therewithal the Poet uses very great freedom in regard to time; transferring to Denmark, in fact, the social and intellectual England of his own day.

We have seen that the *Hamlet* of 1604 was greatly enlarged. The enlargement, however, is mainly in the contemplative and imaginative parts, little being added in the way of action and incident. And in respect of those parts, there is no comparison between the two copies; the differ-

ence is literally immense. In the earlier text we have little more than a naked though in the main well-ordered and well-knit skeleton, which, in the later, is everywhere replenished and glorified with large, rich volumes of thought and poetry; where all that is incidental and circumstantial is made subordinate to the living energies of mind and soul.

Accordingly Schlegel well describes this play as "a tragedy of thought." Such is, indeed, its character; in which respect it stands alone among all the tragedies in being; and it takes this character from the hero's mind. Hamlet everywhere floods the scene with intellectual wealth, and this in the varied forms of wit, humour, poetry, and high philosophy, with large stores of moral and practical wisdom: affluent with the spoils of learning, of genius, and art, he pours out in inexhaustible variety and profusion, enriching and adorning whatever he touches, and making it fresh, racy, delectable, and instructive. And he does all this without any sign of exertion; does it with the ease and fluency of a free native impulse, such as to preclude the idea of its being a special purpose with him. For, with all his redundancy of mental treasure, he nowhere betrays the least ostentation of intellect. It is plainly the unlaboured, unaffected issue of a mind so full that it cannot choose but overflow.

But perhaps the leading characteristic of this play lies in its strong resemblance to the Classic Tragedy, in that the action is, in a very peculiar degree, dominated by what the ancients called Fate, but what, in Christian language, is termed Providence. In no other modern drama do we take so deep an impression of a superhuman power presiding over a war of irregular and opposing forces, and calmly working out its own purpose through the baffled, disjointed, and conflicting purposes of human agents. Of course, the Poet's genius is itself the providence of the play. But here, again, his insight is so profound and so just, his workmanship so true to the course of human experience, that all things come to pass just as if ordered by the Divine

Providence of the world. And, however the persons go at cross-aims with each other or themselves, they nevertheless still move true to the author's aim: their confused and broken schemes he uses as the elements of a higher order; and the harshest discords of their plane of thought serve to enrich and deepen the harmonies of his; their very blunders and failures ministering to his success, their wilfulness to his law, their madness to his reason.

Hamlet himself has caused more of perplexity and discussion than any other character in the whole range of art. The charm of his mind and person amounts to an almost universal fascination; and he has been well described as "a concentration of all the interests that belong to humanity." I have learned by experience, that one seems to understand him better after a little study than after a great deal; and that the less one sees into him, the more apt one is to think he sees through him; in which respect he is indeed like Nature herself.

One man considers Hamlet great, but wicked; another, good, but weak; a third, that he lacks courage, and dare not act; a fourth, that he has too much intellect for his will, and so reflects away the time of action: some conclude his madness half genuine; others, that it is wholly feigned. Yet, notwithstanding this diversity of opinions, all agree in thinking and speaking of him as an actual person; and, while all are impressed with the truth of the character, hardly any one is satisfied with another's interpretation of it. That there should be such unanimity as to his being a man, and at the same time such diversity as to what sort of a man he is, appears something rather curious, to say the least.

Touching the main point in Hamlet's course, the more common view is that of his will being practically crippled by excess of intellect. Coleridge gives the best statement of it. "We see," says he, "a great, an almost enormous intellectual activity, and a proportionate aversion to real

action consequent upon it, with all its symptoms and accompanying qualities. Hamlet is brave, and careless of death; but he vacillates from sensibility, and procrastinates from thought, and loses the power of action in the energy of resolve."

Coleridge was himself a great thinker and an incorrigible procrastinator; and of the latter at least he was fully conscious: and he tells us that he saw, or thought he saw, a good deal of his own besetting infirmity in Hamlet. Coleridge was a great philosopher, a great poet, and also in the main a profound and judicious critic. But I have never been able to see any thing of Coleridge in Hamlet, except, perhaps, his greatness of intellect: neither of the men would ever put me in mind of the other, except on the lines of contrast.

Professor Dowden, of Dublin, in his admirable work on Shakespeare's Mind and Art, holds, substantially, the same view; and he works it out with great — perhaps I should say great ingenuity; but I dislike to apply so equivocal a term to so intelligent and so candid a workman; — he works it out with marked ability, and with great fulness and felicity of argument.

The method of criticism, exemplified in its best form by Coleridge and Dowden, has been carried to a vicious and absurd extreme by certain other critics of our time; critics who, instead of receiving into their minds *the* real objective Hamlet, with his proper moral, social, and political surroundings, just read their own subjectiveness into the delineation, and so evolve *a* Hamlet out of their inner consciousness. What this process is, may well be familiar to all intelligent Bostonians: for Boston has had a pretty long and large succession of men *and* women, whose main business has been to evolve or spin new religions out of their inner consciousness; they supposing, of course, that the revelations they had inside of themselves were far more authentic and authoritative than any coming to them from without, whether through Scripture, history, or experience.

Why, Boston is able to supply you the whole world with an entire new set of such religions as often at least as once every year; and she is so benevolent, withal, and so generous, that, instead of charging any thing for these treasures of light, she will pay the receivers handsomely for accepting them!

This method of projecting our own morbid or egotistical humours upon an artist's work, and then only receiving back what we have ourselves expectorated, has spoilt a good deal of criticism, drawing it clean out of the region of common sense. And a like process has perhaps been equally fatal to a great deal of poetry; poetry wherein the authors, instead of endeavouring to sweeten away their inward sourness by opening their hearts, and freely inhaling the sweetness of external Nature, have found a sickly sentimental pleasure in breathing their inward sourness upon her, and then mistaking the mere reflection of their own breath for her proper inspiration. The scope and sense of this process are aptly expressed by Coleridge in the well-known axiomatic couplet,

> "O Lady! we receive but what we give,
> And in our life alone does Nature live";

the exact reverse of which comes much nearer the truth. For, assuredly, the mind, if rightly receptive, receives from without something vastly different from what it gives, and as much better as it is different. Nature has a life of her own altogether independent of us; a life which is far wider, deeper, stronger, richer than any thing that lies in our power to confer, and which it is the blessed privilege of our inner life to feed upon, and to grow into the strength and fulness of. But then, if we would really drink-in soul-power from the fulness either of Nature or of Art, we must take mighty good care not to be too full of ourselves!

Now I have been studying Hamlet more than forty years, — studying him with such small powers of thought as I had. It is now thirty-eight years since I wrote my first lecture on

the play; which lecture, along with others, I delivered in Boston as far back as 1845. During the subsequent interval, my views of Hamlet have indeed, in some respects, changed, — whether for the better or for the worse, is not for me to judge. But, as regards the particular point now in hand, my old view has stood and stands to this day substantially the same. I have never been able to see in Hamlet any thing like the mean and miserable lack of manhood, or of executive force, which the critics in question charge him with, and sometimes vituperate him for. As for his holding back from killing Claudius, I do not, I cannot, ascribe this to any fault or blamable weakness in himself, or to any subjective causes whatsoever: it proceeds, and, I think, proceeds rightly and legitimately, from objective causes, — causes that are objectively valid and sufficient. Nor have I ever been able to see any thing of myself in Hamlet; any thing, I mean, except that Hamlet seems to me thoroughly and intensely human; and I am apt enough to think there may be something of the human in me also.

But, with the critics so generally on the other side, I have been somewhat distrustful of my own judgment, and have, until lately, rather shrunk from a full and free expression of my thoughts. At length, in 1877, on the appearance of Mr. Furness's superb *Variorum* edition, I there found large portions of Professor Karl Werder's essay on Hamlet choicely translated. This essay seemed to me then, as it seems to me still, altogether the justest and most adequate analytic interpretation of the character that criticism has yet produced. I read the matter again and again, with intense avidity, and with almost unalloyed satisfaction; feeling that there, for the first time, the real scope of the theme had been rightly seized, and its contents properly discoursed. The essay was indeed surpassingly welcome to me, in some points confirming my previous views, in others supplementing and completing them; and I gladly acknowledge myself greatly indebted to the author in the following exposition of the character.

The main fault, then, as it seems to me, of the critics in question is, that they try to explain Hamlet's course altogether too much on subjective grounds and from subjective causes, and so give far too little attention to the real nature of his task, to the exigencies of his situation, to the circumstances of his social and political whereabout; strong objective reasons that stare him in the face, and force themselves upon his thoughts, and this too because his thinking is so quick, so circumspective, so comprehensive, and so just. And I quite agree with Mr. Halliwell, that no criticism on Hamlet can live, which does not recognize his thorough nobleness of character. For, as he stands to my mind, his supreme desire is, to think and do what is right, — right morally, socially, politically, and according to old English ideas. I therefore hold it a matter of high concernment to us, that we learn to regard him as a truly heroic and honourable pattern of manhood. Surely it cannot but be good and wholesome for us to sympathize with him in his sensitive rectitude, his delicacy and tenderness of conscience, and in his prizing above all things the sacred freehold of "clean hands and a pure heart." And I lay the more stress on this, because a turn of criticism has lately crept into vogue, which, conceiting itself to have outgrown old-fashioned moral regards, places its ideal of manly heroism in sheer lawlessness of impulse, and in an impious audacity of thought and will.

The principal personages of the drama stand at or near the head of the State, and thus move in the highest public representative capacity: the whole world of Denmark is most nearly concerned in them as the recognized supreme organs of the national life and law. In the political order of the play, the Danish crown is partly elective, partly hereditary; that is to say, elective within the circle of a particular family and kindred. Whatever there is of hereditary right belongs to the Queen, who is accordingly described as "the imperial jointress of this warlike State." She was

the only child of the former King; and Hamlet's father was brought within the circle of eligibility by his marriage with her. Of course, when her first husband died, and she married a second, the second became eligible just as the first had done. So that Claudius, the present King, holds the crown by the same legal title and tenure as Hamlet's father had held it.

A horrible crime has been committed, — a crime the meanest, the blackest, the hatefullest that man is capable of. Claudius has murdered his own brother and his King; stealing upon him in his sleep, and pouring a slow but deadly poison in his ear, which so wrought that he seemed to die of a natural though mysterious disease. The deed was done so secretly and with such consummate craft as to elude and defy all human discovery. It was and could be known only to the author of it, and to God; even the victim knew nothing of it till after his death. No trace of the crime, not an atom of evidence, nothing even to ground a suspicion upon, exists, save in the conscience of the criminal himself. So that the hideous secret lies buried in the grave of the murdered man; and no revelation of it is possible on Earth, but by his coming out of the tomb. Through this act of fratricide and regicide, Claudius has hewed his way to the Danish throne; he having beforehand made love to the Queen, and seduced and corrupted her.

Claudius is essentially a low, coarse, sensual, brutish villain; without honour and without shame; treacherous and cruel in the last degree; at once hateful, loathsome, and execrable. At the same time he is mighty shrewd and sagacious; quick and fertile of resource; inscrutably artful and cunning; withal, utterly remorseless and unscrupulous, and sticking at nothing, however base or wicked, to gain his ends, or to secure himself in what he has gained. Thus he stands forth "a bold bad man," of a character too vile and too shocking to be suffered to live, yet exceedingly formidable to contend with, — formidable from his astuteness, formidable from his unscrupulousness; above all, for-

midable from the powers and prerogatives with which he is invested as an absolute king. Such as he is, Hamlet knows him thoroughly; understands alike his meanness, his malice, and his cunning; takes the full measure both of his badness and his potency.

It appears that the Queen was nowise an accomplice directly in the murder; that she had, indeed, no knowledge of it, perhaps no suspicion. But she has incurred guilt enough in suffering such a wretch to make love to her when she had a husband living; in being seduced by his "wicked wit and gifts"; and then in rushing, with indecent and shameless haste, into a marriage held deeply criminal in itself, even though the forms of decorum had been strictly observed in the time and manner of it. These doings have fallen with terrible weight upon her son, oppressing his soul with unutterable grief and shame, and filling his mind with irrepressible suspicions and divinings of foul play. He knows not how or why it is, but he feels that the air about him is all tainted with the breath of hypocrisy and lust, of treachery and murder; insomuch that he would gladly escape, even by his own death, from scenes so horrible and so disgusting.

The proper action of the play turns upon the circumstance, that the hero meets and converses with the Ghost of his murdered father, and thence learns by what means Claudius has reached his present position. He thereupon starts off in a most strange, inexplicable course of behaviour: he seems quite beside himself; acts as if he were crazy. — Shakespeare's persons, generally, affect us just like those in actual life; so that we severally take different impressions and form diverse opinions of them. Especially is it so in the case of Hamlet. Hence it has been variously argued and discussed, whether his madness be real or feigned, or whether it be sometimes the one, sometimes the other. My own judgment is, and long has been, that he is really mad; deranged not indeed in all his faculties, nor in

any of them continuously; that is to say, the derangement is partial and occasional: in other words, he is mad in spots and at times; paroxysms of wildness and fury alternating with intervals of serenity and composure. My main reasons for this judgment are as follows:

1. From the natural structure and working of his mind; from the recent doings in the royal family; from the state of things at the Court; still more from his interview with the Ghost, and the Ghost's appalling disclosures and injunctions, "shaking his disposition with thoughts beyond the reaches of his soul"; above all, from his instant view and grasp of the whole dire situation in which he is now placed; — from all this, he *ought* to be crazy; and it were vastly to his credit, both morally and mentally, to be so: we might well be amazed at the morbid strength or the natural weakness of his mind, if he were not so. We are told that, against stupidity, the gods themselves are powerless. And, sure enough, there are men with hearts so hard, and with heads so stolid and stockish, that even the gods cannot make them mad; at least, not, unless through some physical disease. Hamlet, I think, can hardly be a man of that stamp.

2. It is a part of the old ghost-lore, that the being talked with by a ghost either finds a man mad or makes him so. If the ghost be subjective, — that is, a mere spectral illusion born of a diseased or frenzied brain, — then the interview finds him mad, the pre-existing madness causing the illusion: but if, on the other hand, the ghost be really objective, and duly authenticated as such, as it is in the case of Hamlet, then the interview causes the madness. This old notion is referred to by Horatio, when he tries to dissuade Hamlet from following the Ghost, on the ground that the Ghost may depose his "sovereignty of reason, and draw him into madness." At all events, the being thus ghosted was held to be no such trifling matter as we are apt to consider it: it was accounted a very pokerish, soul-harrowing business; insomuch that a man, after such an expe-

rience, could hardly continue the same he was before. And so Hamlet, directly after his conversation with the Ghost, on being rejoined by his friends, flies off into a course of behaviour so strange, so wild, so eccentric, as to throw them into amazement.

3. Hamlet is believed to be really mad by all the other persons in the play, though they are quite in the dark as to the cause; all, I mean, except the King, whose evil conscience renders him nervously suspicious that the madness is assumed, to cover some hostile design. Of course, this so general belief arises because he acts precisely as madmen often do; because his conduct displays the proper symptoms and indications of madness: nor does it make at all against this belief, that his behaviour has many contra-indicants. And, on this point, Hamlet himself, it appears, agrees with the rest: for, in his generous apology, his solemn appeal, to Laertes, near the close, — where I cannot think it just to pronounce him insincere, — he alleges his mental disorder as fairly entitling him to the pardon which he asks for the offence he has given. And, indeed, it seems to be admitted, on the other side, that, if Hamlet were actually mad, he could not enact the madman more perfectly than he does. "If," says Professor Lowell, "Shakespeare himself, without going mad, could so observe and remember all the abnormal symptoms as to be able to reproduce them in Hamlet, why should it be beyond the power of Hamlet to reproduce them in himself?" This means, I take it, that Hamlet counterfeits madness with an imitation so perfect as to be indistinguishable from a genuine case. But, if so, then what ground is there for saying it is not a genuine case?

4. Many distinguished members of the medical profession, deeply learned in the science, and of approved skill in the treatment, of insanity, have, in our time, made a special study of Hamlet's case, as also of Shakespeare's other delineations of madness; and — without a single exception, so far as I know — have all reached the same conclusion.

I cannot but think that here their judgment ought to have much the same weight which it is allowed to have in actual cases. Dr. Conolly, of England, referring to Hamlet's first soliloquy, — O, that this too-too solid flesh would melt, &c., — has the following: "Of his father's ghost he has at this time heard nothing. No thought of feigning melancholy can have entered his mind; but he is even now most heavily shaken and discomposed, — indeed, so violently, that his reason, although not dethroned, is certainly well-nigh deranged." Dr. Isaac Ray, also, formerly of Providence, in a very able and well-considered essay on the subject, states it as "a scientific fact, that Hamlet's mental condition furnishes in abundance the pathological and psychological symptoms of insanity in wonderful harmony and consistency." And Dr. A. O. Kellogg, of Utica, fully concurs with Dr. Ray. "There are," says he, "cases of melancholic madness, of a delicate shade, in which the reasoning faculties, the intellect proper, so far from being overcome, or even disordered, are rendered more active and vigorous. Such a case Shakespeare has given us in the character of Hamlet, with a fidelity to nature which continues more and more to excite our wonder and astonishment, as our knowledge of this intricate subject advances."

It is to be remembered, however, that a mind diseased is by no means necessarily a mind destroyed; and that it may be only a mind with some of its faculties whirled into intemperate and irregular volubility, while others of them are more or less palsied. And Dr. Ray justly observes, in regard to Hamlet, that madness "is compatible with some of the ripest and richest manifestations of intellect."

Now the reality of Hamlet's madness is a thing which the literary critics have been strangely reluctant to admit; partly because they thought it discreditable to his intellect, and partly because they did not understand the exceeding versatility and multiformity of that disease. And one natural effect of the disease, as we see it in him, is, that the several parts of his behaviour have no apparent kindred or

fellowship with each other: it makes him full of abrupt changes and contradictions; his action when the paroxysm is upon him being palpably inconsistent with his action when properly himself. And, as the critics have supposed that amid all his changes there must be a constant principle, and as they could not discover that principle, they have therefore referred it to some "unknown depth" in his being; whereas in madness the constant principle is either wholly paralyzed or else more or less subject to fits of paralysis; which latter is the case with Hamlet. Accordingly insane people are commonly said to be, not themselves, but *beside themselves.*

It is to be noted withal, that in Hamlet the transpirations of character and those of disease interpenetrate and cross each other in a great many ways, so that it is often difficult, and sometimes impossible, to distinguish where they respectively end or begin. Rather say, his sanity and madness shade off imperceptibly into each other, so as to admit of no clear dividing line between them. This has been a further source of perplexity to the critics, who, because they could not see precisely when the malady comes in and goes out, have been fain to deny its existence altogether. Coleridge affirms indeed that "Hamlet's madness is but half-false," which seems to imply that it is but half-true, or that he is not downright mad.

What was wanting in order to a just criticism of the delineation, was a profound and comprehensive science as to the nature and genesis of mental disease; such a science as could only come by a large acquaintance with the phenomena of insanity in its multitudinous forms and degrees. Until a recent date, the "experts" in this science appear not to have thought of consulting Shakespeare in their professional capacity, as taking for granted that he could not possibly have anticipated the mature results of an investigation that had hardly been so much as entered upon in his time. It now appears, however, that he was beforehand with them in some of the most hidden specialties of their

department. Nor is it certain that the science has fully caught up with him yet. Be that as it may, to the Medico-Psychological Faculty belongs the merit of having solved the problem over which the literary critics had puzzled so long in vain.

Hamlet himself both affirms and denies his madness; the one in his moments of calmness, the other when the fit is strong upon him. Nor is there any reason but that in both he may be perfectly sincere. It is commonly supposed that insane people are always unconscious of their state; whereas there are many cases in which the patient is more or less conscious of it. And the degree of consciousness is apt to be inversely as that of the disease. So that the being conscious is no sure proof of simulation; in fact, any one simulating would be almost certain to pretend unconsciousness, and so betray his falsehood by overacting his part. Thus Hamlet, in the first turn of his distemper, when he utters such "wild and whirling words," seems to be at least partly aware of his state, for he speaks of it. Once only (in the scene with his mother) does his paroxysm run to so high a pitch that he loses the consciousness of it entirely, insomuch that he goes to arguing against it. In this case, at least, his mind is completely enthralled to illusions spun out of itself; the ghost which he sees and hears being purely subjective, as is evident in that his mother neither hears nor sees any thing of the kind. Well might she say, "this bodiless creation ecstasy is very cunning in." Yet here his intellectual faculties are kindled to the most overwhelming eloquence, burning both his mother and himself with their preternatural light.

Shakespeare's great, earnest, delicate mind seems to have been specially charmed with those forms of mental disease in which the intellect is kindled into preternatural illumination and expression. We have many instances of this; as in old Timon's terrible eloquence of invective; in Macbeth's guilt-inspired raptures of meditation; in Lear's heart-withering imprecations; and most of all in Hamlet's profound

moralizing, his tempestuous strains of self-reproach, and his over-wrought consciousness of "thoughts that wander through eternity." I have sometimes thought that an instinct of genius may have put the Poet upon these frequent displays of mental exorbitancy, because the normal workings of the human mind did not afford scope enough for the full discharge of his own colossal and "thousand-souled" intellectuality.

My own idea, then, is, that, in order to make this play emphatically a tragedy of thought, the Poet's method was, to conceive a man great, perhaps equally so, in all the elements of character, mental, moral, and practical; and then to place him in such circumstances and bring such influences to work upon him, that all his greatness should be made to take on the form of thought. And with a swift intuitive perception of the laws of mind, which the ripest science can hardly overtake, he seems to have known just what kind and degree of mental disturbance or disease would naturally operate to produce such an irregular and exorbitant grandeur of intellectual manifestation.

To return for a moment to the particular question of Hamlet's madness. Why should he feign to be mad? How can he further, or hope to further, his end by assuming such a part? It does not help him onward at all; it rather hinders him; the natural effect of his conduct being to arouse suspicions in the King's mind, to put him on the alert, and to make him guard himself with redoubled vigilance. Let us see how it is.

The Ghost enjoins upon Hamlet two things; first, "Revenge this foul and most unnatural murder"; second, "Howsoever thou pursuest this act, taint not thy mind." Thus time and manner are left to Hamlet's own judgment; only he must not, he must not corrupt himself with any wicked or dishonorable course of action. He is solemnly warned against pursuing revenge by any methods involving self-defilement; and is to proceed as ever bearing in mind that

> "Him, only him the shield of Jove defends,
> Whose means are fair and spotless as his ends."

He might take off Claudius as secretly, and in some such way, as Claudius has taken off his father; but this would be to stain himself with the most abominable guilt and baseness. Whatsoever he does, he must be ready to avow it in the face of all Denmark, and to stand responsible for it. Come what may, he must, he can, use no arts but manly arts. Observe, then, what a dreadful dilemma he is placed in: he must punish, it is his most sacred duty to punish, a crime which it is not possible for him to prove, and which must not be punished till it has been proved. His strong, clear head instantly takes in the whole truth of his situation; comprehends at a glance the entire case in all its points and bearings. All this may well fill him, as indeed it does, with the most excruciating and inevitable agony; and, while he thus lives in torture, his mighty suffering, even because he is so strong, arouses all his faculties, and permits not a particle of the intellectual man to be lost.

Thus, from the time of his interview with the Ghost, all is changed with Hamlet; all, both without and within: henceforth he lives in quite another world, and is himself quite another man. All his old aims and aspirations are to be sternly renounced and thrust aside: life can have no more joys for him: his whole future must be cast in a new shape. All the duties upon which his thoughts have been hitherto centred are now merged in the one sacred, all-absorbing task enjoined upon him as from Heaven itself.

Now so great, so sudden, so agonizing a change within cannot but work some corresponding change without: it will naturally and even necessarily register itself in his manner and behaviour: while he *is* so different, how is it possible he should appear the same? And he himself evidently foresees that this change will cause him to be regarded as beside himself, as out of his right mind; especially as he cannot disclose the reason of it, and must, by all

means, keep the cause of that change, or even any whisper of it, from reaching the King or the Court. A behaviour so strange, so odd, so unaccountable, must needs appear to others to have sprung from a stroke of madness. All this he clearly forecasts, as indeed he well may. And he desires, apparently, that his action may be so construed: he lets his "antic disposition" have free course; and rather studies than otherwise to sustain and strengthen the imputation of madness, by his conduct. If any see fit to call this feigning, so be it: the question is not worth wrangling about. "To this degree," says Professor Werder, "to this degree, which is relatively slight, he makes believe, he *plays* the madman. But, because it is essentially his truth, the effect of his real suffering, of his shattered being, to which his mind gives vent, so far as it can without betraying his secret; because it is *his* torture, his rage, his cry of woe, his agony, thus outwardly expressed; therefore this playing of his is not *merely* feigning, and because not merely, therefore not feigning at all, in the strict sense of the word."

Our hero is not indeed master of the situation; but he *understands* the situation, which is just what most of his critics have not done; and he is not master of it, simply because, as things stand, such mastery is quite beyond the power of any man, without help from above. The critics in question insist upon it, that the one thing which Hamlet ought to do, and which he would do, if he had any real backbone of executive energy, is, to strike the avenging blow with instant dispatch, on the first opportunity. Such an opportunity he has, or can make, at almost any time. But to do thus would be both a crime and a blunder, and a blunder even more than a crime. How shall he justify such a deed to the world? how vindicate himself from the very crime which he must allege against the King? For, as he cannot subpœna the Ghost, the evidence on which he is to act is available only in the court of his own conscience. To serve any good end, the deed must so stand to the public

eye as it does to his own; else he will be in effect setting an example of murder, not of justice. And the CROWN will seem to be his real motive, duty but a pretence. Can a man of his "large discourse looking before and after" be expected to act thus?

We, to be sure, long impatiently to have the crowned murderer get his deserts, because the whole truth of his guilt is known to us; but the people of Denmark, Hamlet's social and political world, know nothing of it whatever, and can never be convinced of it, should he proceed in that way. For the Ghost's disclosures were made to his ear alone; nobody else heard a word of them. And is it to be supposed that the Ghost's tale will be received on his sole word? that, too, in behalf of an act by which he has cut away the only obstacle between himself and the throne? The very alleging of such grounds will be regarded as, if possible, a worse crime than that in defence of which they are alleged. To the Danish people Hamlet will needs himself appear to be just what he charges Claudius with being. Claudius is their lawful King; they are his loyal subjects: they will not suffer their chosen ruler to be assassinated with impunity; they will hold themselves bound to wreak upon Hamlet the very vengeance which he claims to have wreaked upon Claudius. Unless he summon the Ghost into court as a witness, every man will set him down either as a raving maniac, to be held in chains, or else as a monstrous liar and villain, who has murdered at once his uncle, his mother's husband, and his King; and then has trumped up a ghost-story in order at the same time to shield himself and to blacken his victim!

Most assuredly, therefore, the deed which the critics in question so loudly call for is the very thing of all others which Hamlet ought *not* to do, which he must not do; which, moreover, he cannot do, for the simple reason that he is armed with such manifold strength; because he is strong in reason, in judgment, in right feeling, in conscience, in circumspection, in prudence, in self-control, as well as in

hand, in courage, in passion, in filial reverence, and in a just abhorrence of the King's guilt. That he does not deal the avenging stroke at once, — than which nothing were easier for him, were he not just the strong-willed man that he is; were he a mere roll of explosive, impotent passion, like Laertes; — this the critics aforesaid ascribe, some to constitutional or habitual procrastination, others to an intellectual activity so disproportionate as to quench what little force of will he may have.

Against all this, I make bold to affirm that, if Hamlet has any one attribute in larger measure than another, it is that very power which these critics accuse him of lacking. They, forsooth, see no strength of will in him, because, while he has this, he has also the other parts of manhood equally strong. Now the main peculiarity, the most distinctive feature of Hamlet's case is, that, from the inevitable, pressing, exigent circumstances of his position, — circumstances quite beyond his mastery, quite beyond all mere human mastery, — his strength of will has, and must have, its highest exercise, its supreme outcome, in self-restraint and self-control; an indwelling power laying the strong hand of law upon him, and causing him to respect the clear, consenting counsels of reason, of prudence, of justice, and conscience, — counsels which his quick, powerful, well-poised intellect perfectly understands. And the act which the critics require of him, so far from evincing strength of will, would do just the reverse; it would evince nothing but the impotence of a blind, headlong, furious passion, — a transport of rage so violent as to take away all that responsibility which everybody understands to adhere to a truly voluntary act. In other words, it would be an act not so much of executive energy as of destructive fury.

Hamlet, to be sure, is not always in the same mood; it would be strange indeed if he were: he appears in very different moods at sundry times. He is a man of deep and strong feelings; his sensibilities are quick and keen. But he is also quick and strong in understanding, or in the

"large discourse looking before and after." Now his feelings are ever goading him on to the instant stroke of revenge; nothing else can satisfy them: they are bidding him throw consequences to the winds; and would have him act just as Laertes talks: "To Hell, allegiance! vows, to the blackest devil! conscience and grace to the profoundest pit! To this point I stand, — that both the worlds I give to negligence, let come what comes; only I'll be revenged most throughly for my father." Meanwhile his judgment keeps holding him back, as it certainly should. Hence there springs up a fierce, tugging, agonized conflict between these two parts of his inner man; and his feelings become terribly insurgent and clamorous. Sometimes, especially in his soliloquies, his feelings seem to get the upper hand of him; he takes part with them, and goes to pleading their cause most vehemently, against his higher self; seeking to ease, or to appease, his dreadful heart-agony with overwrought strains of self-reproach, and with hopes of speedy satisfaction. All this is profoundly natural; and many of us, perhaps all of us, can readily interpret it from our own experience. In action, however, Hamlet stands firm and true to his higher self: here, judgment keeps the upper hand; and though he cannot silence his insurgent feelings, yet, in his strength of will, he can and does overrule them. While the heart is boiling-hot within him, and almost ready to burst its case, still his head, though full of power, and though all alive within, remains, generally, cool; his passion never but once swamping him into an oblivion of the strong objective considerations which I have already remarked.

Hamlet, as before observed, is called upon to revenge a crime which is altogether unproved, and which, from the nature of the case, is utterly *unprovable*, except from the criminal's own mouth: apart from this source, he has not, and cannot get, a particle of evidence available for impressing upon the world wherein he lives a judicial or even a

moral conviction of the King's guilt. This is just the cardinal point in Hamlet's case. So that, matters standing thus, killing Claudius would be not so much a punishment of the guilty as a murder of the proof. As the only possible evidence is to come from Claudius himself, Claudius must by all means be kept alive, till he can be made his own accuser, and a witness against himself; or rather, till either his conscience shall drive him to "proclaim his malefactions," or else his guilt, to barricade its safety, shall thrust him upon other crimes so monstrous and so evident, that all shall see him as he is, and acknowledge his punishment just. Meanwhile, Hamlet must, above all things, refrain from the avenging stroke; must strain his utmost powers, if need be, to that end. That he does thus hold himself back from the deed to which his burning passion for justice and his righteous thirst of vengeance are continually urging him, — in all this I must still think he displays an almost superhuman degree of that very thing which he is alleged to be without.

The critics indeed talk just as if it were a matter lying solely between Hamlet and Claudius; just as if the people of Denmark had nothing to say, no rights involved, no concern, in the question. Hamlet does not see it so; and he would discover a pitch of egotism literally inhuman, if he did. Every lover of his kind naturally desires, both in life and in death, the good opinion of his kind. This is partly because such opinion is an indispensable condition of his serving them. And so Hamlet has a just, a benevolent, and an honourable concern as to what the world may think of him: he craves, as every good man must crave, to have his name sweet in the mouths, his memory fragrant and precious in the hearts, of his countrymen. How he feels on this point, is touchingly shown in his dying moments, when he wrenches the cup of poison from Horatio's hand, and appeals at once to his strong love and his great sorrow:

> "O God, Horatio! what a wounded name,
> Things standing thus unknown, shall live behind me!
> If ever thou didst hold me in thy heart,
> Absent thee from felicity awhile,
> And in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain,
> To tell my story."

Thus the hero's hands are inextricably tied, — tied, not through any defect, nor through any excess, in himself; not through any infirmity of will or courage or resolution, but from the insurmountable difficulties of his situation. It is not, it is not, that an intellectual impetuosity, or a redundancy of thought, cripples or in any way retards his power of action; but that the utter impossibility of acting, without covering himself, in all human account, with the guilt of parricide and regicide, prodigiously stimulates and quickens his powers of thought, and keeps his splendid intellect in an incessant transport of exercise. And so the very plan of the drama, as I understand it, is to crush all the intellectual fragrance out of him, between a necessity and an impossibility of acting. The tremendous problem, the terrible dilemma which he has to grapple with, is one that Providence alone can solve, as Providence does solve it at the last.

As if on purpose to warn and guard us against imputing Hamlet's delay to the cause alleged, the Poet takes care to provide us with ample means for a different judgment; showing him, again and again, to be abundantly energetic and prompt in action whenever the way is clear before him. So it is in his resolution to meet and address the Ghost; in his breaking away from the hands of friendship when the Ghost beckons him to follow; in his devising and executing the scheme for making the King's "occulted guilt unkennel itself"; and especially in his action on shipboard, when he sends the King's agents to the fate they have prepared for himself. In these cases, as in various others also, he discovers any thing but a defect of active energy:

his mental powers range themselves under the leading of a most vigorous and steady will. And his conduct appears, moreover, strictly normal, and not spasmodic or exceptional; I mean, it is clearly the result of character, not of disease.

Thus much for the reasons of Hamlet's course, as these are personal to himself. But the Poet had other reasons of his own, indispensable reasons of art, for not making Hamlet act as the critics would have him. Shakespeare portrays many great criminals, men, and women too, who for a while ride in triumph over virtue wronged, persecuted, crushed. And he always brings them to punishment, so far as this world can punish them. But he never in a single instance does this till their crimes are laid open to the world, so that all about them recognize the justice of their fate, and are righteously glad at what befalls them. In all this Shakespeare is profoundly, religiously true to the essential order and law of all right tragic representation. For our moral nature, as tuned in sympathy with its Source, reaps a deep, solemn, awful joy from such vindications of the Divine law.

Now the very nature and idea of a proper tragic revenge or retribution require that the guilty be not put to death, till their guilt has been proved; and so proved, that the killing of them shall be manifestly a righteous act, — shall stand to the heart and conscience of mankind as an act of solemn and awful justice. To such a revenge, — the only revenge that Hamlet can execute or ought to execute; the only revenge, too, consistent with the genius of the work; — to such a revenge, punishment is necessary; to punishment, justice is necessary; to justice, the vindication of it in the eyes, not merely of the theatre, but of those among whom the action takes place. So that, if Shakespeare had made Hamlet kill Claudius a moment earlier than he does, he would have violated the whole moral law of his art,— that

law whose "seat is the bosom of God, her voice the harmony of the world." And in that case the tragic action, instead of being, to the persons concerned, in any proper sense a righteous procedure, instead of appealing to their high and sacred sympathies with justice, would be a mere stroke of brutal violence, or, at the best, an act of low, savage, personal revenge; such an act as would inevitably array their sympathies with justice *against the avenger of crime*, and enlist them in behalf of the criminal. Thus the proper music of the work would be utterly untuned, and for the terrible of tragic art would be substituted the horrible of untragic bungling. This were to write tragedies for the coarse theatrical sense, for the vulgar apprehension of the crowd before the curtain, and not for the inner courts of the human soul!

All through the first two Acts of the play, and until late in the second scene of the third Act, Hamlet more or less doubts the honesty of the Ghost. The old belief in ghosts held, among other things, that evil spirits sometimes walked abroad, in the likeness of deceased persons, to scare or tempt the living. To this point Halliwell quotes an apt passage from Willet's *Hexapla in Exodum*, 1608: "The devils do counterfeit the spirits and souls of the dead; by this means the Devil more strongly deceiveth, seeing men are ready to hear their parents and friends departed." Hamlet apprehends the possibility of its being so in this case. He therefore craves some direct and decisive confirmation of the Ghost's tale from the King's conscience. When the advent of the Players is announced, he instantly catches at the chance, thus offered, of testing the question, and the possibility, if the Ghost's tale be true, of unmasking Claudius, and of forcing or surprising him into a confession. Nothing could evince more sagacity in planning, or more swiftness in executing, than the action he takes in pursuance of this thought:

"I've heard
That guilty creatures sitting at a play
Have by the very cunning of the scene
Been struck so to the soul, that presently
They have proclaim'd their malefactions;
For murder, though it have no tongue, will speak
With most miraculous organ. I'll have these players
Play something like the murder of my father
Before mine uncle: I'll observe his looks;
I'll tent him to the quick: if he but blench,
I know my course. The spirit that I have seen
May be the Devil: and the Devil hath power
T' assume a pleasing shape; yea, and perhaps,
Out of my weakness and my melancholy,—
As he is very potent with such spirits,—
Abuses me to damn me. I'll have grounds
More relative than this: the play's the thing
Wherein I'll catch the conscience of the King."

The scheme, I need not say, succeeds. The King's behaviour in the interlude fully authenticates to Hamlet, perhaps also to Horatio, the Ghost's tale. Hamlet now *knows* that Claudius is indeed guilty. And Claudius also, as Hamlet well understands, knows that he knows it. But the evidence thus caught, however assuring to Hamlet, is nowise available for the ends of social or even dramatic justice. The Ghost's tale is still just as impossible to be proved to the mind and heart of Denmark, as it was before. But this advantage has been gained, that Claudius must now do one of two things: he must either repent and confess, or else he must try to secure himself by further measures: an attitude merely passive or defensive will no longer do. If he does not repent, there is henceforth a mortal duel between him and Hamlet: one, or the other, or both, of them must go down. As Hamlet lives but to avenge the murder, he must neither die himself nor let the King die, till that work is done. Force he has a hand to repel; fraud he has a mind to scent out, to detect, to defeat; and Claudius must get up very early, and be very busy when up, to out-craft him.

The result of the interlude excites Hamlet to the uttermost: his faculties, his sensibilities are all wrought up to their highest tension. All on fire, as he is, he may well say,

> "Now could I drink hot blood,
> And do such bitter business as the day
> Would quake to look on."

In this state of mind he comes upon Claudius while in the act of praying. Now he has a fair chance, now, in his white-heat of rage, to deal the avenging blow: the self-convicted fratricide is there, alone, before him, and is completely at his mercy. All through his frame the blood is boiling: still his reason tells him that such a hit will be a fatal miss, and will irretrievably lose him his cause. His judgment, his prudence, his self-control are assailed and pressed by such an overwhelming stress and energy of passion, that they are all but forced to give way: so mighty is the impulse of revenge within him, that even his iron strength of will can hardly withstand it: and, to brace his judgment against his passion, he has to summon up a counterpoising passion in aid of his judgment. Even his inexpressible hatred of the King is itself called in, to help him through the potent temptation, and to keep him from striking the King. This, I take it, is the meaning of the dreadful reasons and motives which he raves out for sparing Claudius. He will take him while in the act of committing such sins as will make sure the perdition of his soul. In all this, it seems to me, the providence of the drama is using one of Hamlet's maddest fits, to foreshadow the far deeper, fouler, more damning sins amidst which this execrable wretch ultimately falls.

Now that Hamlet is, beyond all peradventure, certified of the King's guilt, the next thing for him to do is, to come to a full and perfect understanding with his mother. He must see her by herself. He must search her breast to the bottom, he must "turn her eyes into her very soul,"

with his burning eloquence of indignation, of shame, of reproof, of remonstrance, of expostulation: he must arouse the better feelings of the woman and the mother in her heart, and through these, if possible, must redeem her from the blasting curse of her present position: above all, he must know from her directly, either through her words or her manner, whether she was any way conspirant in the murder of his father; and he must also let her know, with an emphasis not to be resisted, both his opinion of Claudius and how matters are standing between Claudius and himself. While he is on the point of doing this; while, with his soul agitated to its innermost depths, he is talking with her; while he is standing in the room and beside the bed in which himself was born, and which she has so shockingly dishonoured; Polonius, on a sudden, raises an outcry behind the hangings: Hamlet, supposing the voice to be the King's, is surprised, snatched, swept quite away from himself with a whirlwind gust of passion: instantly, with the speed of lightning, out leaps his sword from the scabbard, as of its own accord, and kills the old intriguer.

By this instant lapse of self-control, Hamlet has lost his lead in the game, and given Claudius a great advantage over him; which advantage, however, Claudius will so use as to open a clear way for the final triumph of Hamlet's cause, though at a fearful cost of life, his own among the rest. Claudius is now to assume the offensive, and is so to carry it as to achieve his own ruin. For, indeed, his guilt is of such a kind, and is so placed, that it can have its proper retribution only through a process of further development. A dreadful safety indeed! But he will prove far unequal to the sharp exigency in which he will involve himself. Too bad to repent, and too secure in his badness to be reached by human avengement, there is, nevertheless, a Hand which he cannot elude. That Hand is to work his punishment through the springs of his own

moral constitution. Hamlet's piercing, unsleeping eye, now sharpened to its keenest edge, is to be upon him, to penetrate his secretest designs, to trace him through his darkest windings, as his evil genius. His guilt is to entangle him, by an inward law, in a series of diabolical machinations; remorse is to disconcert his judgment, and put him to desperate shifts. Thus his first, most secret, unprovable crime is to goad him on, from within, to perpetrating other crimes, — crimes so open and manifest as to stand in no need of proof; and he is to go out of the world in such a transport of wickedness, lying, poisoning, murdering, that "his heels shall kick at Heaven," sure enough.

Such is the stern, awful, inexorable moral logic of this mighty drama. And its great wisdom lies in nothing more than in the fact, the order, and the method of the hero's being made to serve as the unconscious organ or instrument of the providential retribution. He himself, indeed, is consciously doing the best that can be done in his situation. Meanwhile the Nemesis of the play is working out the result through him, without his knowing it, without his suspecting it. Not till the hand of death is already upon him, does it become possible for him to strike. Now, at length, the seals are opened; now, for the first time, his hands are untied, his passion, his avenging impulse, his will are set free. All this he sees instantly just as it is: instantly, *consciously*, he deals the stroke for which his Divine Helper has secretly prepared the way. He himself falls indeed, but falls as a pure and spotless victim, to feed the sacrificial fire of immortal hopes and aspirations in the human breast; so falls as to leave upon us the hallowed sense, that "flights of Angels sing him to his rest."

I must not dismiss the hero without adverting briefly to one or two other points. — Many people, I suspect, shape their opinions and feelings about Hamlet quite too much from what Hamlet, in some of his soliloquies, says against

himself. In this, they seem to me to take him at his word just there where his word is least to be taken. For, surely, thus to turn his solitary self-communings, his thinkings-aloud, against him, is not fair. Instead of so taking him at his word, we ought to see him better than he then sees himself, and rather, with our calmer and juster vision, to step between him and his morbid self-accusings; to judge him and to maintain his cause upon reasons which he is himself too unselfish, too right-hearted, too noble in mind, to accord their due weight in his thinkings. This holds especially in regard to his soliloquy beginning, "O, what a rogue and peasant slave am I!" where he surges through a long course of railing and storming at himself, bitterly charging himself with faults and vices which his whole conduct most certainly and most clearly acquits him of. This tempestuous strain of self-abuse springs in part from his madness, his disease, which vents itself in that way, and puts him thus to quarrelling with himself, because, in the extreme, unrelenting hardness of his case, he nevertheless will not, dare not go to accusing or arguing against his fate, or fall to quarrelling with what he regards as the inevitable orderings of Providence.

The truth is, Hamlet is suffering dreadfully: shame, indignation, grief, sympathy with his father's purgatorial pains, detestation, horror, at the triumphant murderer, a consuming, holy thirst of vengeance, impossible, as things stand, to be attained, — all these are crowding and pressing his soul together; and his intolerable anguish, instead of easing itself by blaming, by resenting, by deploring his miserable lot, seeks such relief as it can by arraigning himself before himself, as deserving a lot far worse. He thus revenges upon himself, as it were, the inexorable cruelty of his position.

All this is what some of the Poet's critics cannot or will not see; and Hamlet appears to them cold, hard-hearted, indifferent, because they are themselves either so hard or so locked up in their self-applauding critical perspicacity

as to have no ear, no sense for his mute agony. And so they take him at his word! not perceiving that what he says to himself against himself are just the things he would be sure *not* to say, if they were really true; while the things which he does *not* say are so true, and so unutterably crushing in their truth, that he *must* be saying something else. Because he "has that within which passeth show," therefore what he *does* show is taken as a just index and exponent of what he has within.

This brings me to one of the most peculiar and most interesting features in the delineation of Hamlet. — In his intellectual powers, attainments, resources, Hamlet is highly self-conscious, though not at all touched with conceit. In his moral instincts, sentiments, principles, in his beautiful train of manly virtues, his courage, his honour, his reverence, his tenderness, his sense of truth and right, his human-heartedness, his generosity, his self-restraint, his self-sacrifice, — in these he is nobly unconscious; and rather shows his full, deep possession of them by a modest sense, or fear, of his being deficient in them: for these things are apt to be most on the tongue where they are least in the heart. Hence, in part, the singular vein of pathos that permeates the delineation. That pathos is altogether undemonstrative, silent; a deep undercurrent, hardly ever rising to the surface, so as to be directly visible, but kept down by its own weight. Hamlet, as I said before, suffers, suffers dreadfully; but he makes no sign, at least none when his suffering is greatest; or, if any at all, so very slight, as to be scarce heard amidst the louder noises of the play; as in what he says to Horatio, near the close: "Thou wouldst not think how ill all's here about my heart; but it is no matter: it is but foolery; but it is such a kind of gain-giving as would perhaps trouble a woman." Thus his suffering is not made audible to the sense: it is speechless, indeed unspeakable, and left for the inner eye, the intelligent heart, the sympathizing magnet within, to *infer*.

Such is the unspoken pathos of Hamlet's situation, — a pathos so deep, so pure, so refined, so soul-moving, if we have but the eye to see it, that I know not where else we shall find its like. Let us see, for a moment, to recur to a topic already discussed, — let us see how it is with him. If he could but forget the real nature of his task; if he could give free course to his mighty impulse of justice; then he might indeed have at least a respite to the torture that is wringing him. But, because his reason is so strong as to stay his hand, therefore he has to suffer such pain, — the pain of a most powerful will engaged in a mortal struggle against the insurgent forces of passion goading him onward. To quote again from Professor Werder: "To smite down the King, to sacrifice his own life by the blow, in order to be quit of his task at once, that were the easiest, the happiest thing for him; but he *wills* to fulfil it, to *fulfil* it faithfully. What he rails at as 'pigeon-liver'd,' when the mortal nature, impatient of pain, weary of suffering, cries out in him, — all this is enduring courage, the courage of reason, springing from reverence for a holy duty, and from devotion thereto."

But, harsh and bitter as is his lot, Hamlet never complains of it, hardly breathes an audible sigh over it: nay, he will not, if he can help it, let either himself or others see it: heroically he bears it, heroically he hides it. Of self-pity, of self-compassion, he discovers not the slightest symptom; and, so far from saying or doing any thing to stir pity or compassion in others, he is ever trying, though trying spontaneously and unconsciously, to disguise his inward state both from others and from himself; — from himself in high strains of self-accusation; from his true friends in smiles of benevolence, or in fine play of intellect; from his foes and his false friends in caustic, frolicsome banter, and in pointed, stinging remonstrance or reproof. Even when his anguish is shrieking within him, he knits his lips down tight over it, and strangles the utterance. For,

indeed, to his mind, it is not of the slightest consequence how much he suffers in this world, so he does his duty, his whole duty, and nothing but that; and he is so all-intent upon that as to have no time, no heart, for self-commiseration. Now this utter oblivion of self in his vast, incommunicable sorrow is to me just the most pathetic thing in Shakespeare; though, to be sure, the pathos is much less pronounced than in other cases: but I deem it all the better for that.

It is partly to relieve or divert off his sense of woe that his mind is so continually "voyaging through strange seas of thought"; sometimes in outpourings of statesman-like wisdom, such as would add to the fame of a Burke or a Webster; sometimes in profound moralizing on life and death, on duty and immortality, such as would give a richer bloom to the laurels of a Cicero, a Marcus Aurelius, a Jeremy Taylor, or a Sir Thomas Browne; sometimes in well-seasoned discourse on the player's art and on the right virtues of literary style, such as "shames the schools"; now in flashes of wit more than Attic; now in jets of humour the freshest, the raciest, the mellowest, the most suggestive, ever delivered.

All this, to be sure, Hamlet does not himself say; no! nor does the Poet say it for him in words; but the Poet says it through the ineffable dramatic logic of the play, — says it by a speaking silence, a mute eloquence, far more powerful and penetrating than words. It is the "austere and solid sweetness" of a great, strong, delicate soul perfectly self-contained.

The sensitive rectitude which I have ascribed to Hamlet may seem inconsistent with his doings in the matter of the substituted commission. He does indeed discover no particular squeamishness of conscience in that matter. He knows, or at least fully believes, that Guildenstern and Rosencrantz are privy and consenting to the hideous machination against himself:

"Why, man, they did make love to this employment;
They are not near my conscience; their defeat
Does by their own insinuation grow."

Nor can I see any good reason why his moral sense, even granting it to be as deep and delicate as I have supposed, should stick at thus letting such a diabolical scheme "fall on the inventors' heads." It is noticeable that Horatio, in the talk he has with Hamlet on that subject, v. 2, seems to regret or deplore the fate of the King's two agents in crime. He may well think it rather hard. And it is natural enough to suppose that Hamlet, on learning the horrid purpose of his voyage, may have been surprised out of his equanimity, and transported into an act of indiscriminate vengeance. But, in fact, the instant effect of the discovery is, to kindle all his powers of thought into the highest activity. It appears, indeed, that the two agents were not fully in the secret of their commission, else they would have turned back to Denmark, after the separation of Hamlet from them. But then, for aught Hamlet knows, they may have had other reasons for continuing the voyage; they may have been charged with other messages to England. It is to be noted also, that, at the time, Hamlet was expecting to go to England with them; and it has been suggested that, had he done so, he would have arrested the effect of the substituted commission. But I prefer the view taken by Professor Werder:

"As surely as Rosencrantz and Guildenstern deliver their letter, his head falls. *That* letter, then, they *must not be allowed* to deliver; they *must* deliver a different one. Do you say he could have spared them? he could have written something that would endanger neither him nor them? But does he know or can he discover from them so that he may depend upon their word, how far they are cognizant of the purport of their errand? whether they are not charged with some oral message? What if they should contradict what he might write of a harmless character? What if the King of England, being in doubt, should send back to Denmark for further directions, detain all three, and then,

as surely was to be expected, put Hamlet to death? No, there is no expedient possible, no evasion, no choice between *thus* and otherwise. He *must* sacrifice them, *and* even without allowing them time to confess, — *must* do this even. For, if only they are allowed time for confession, after they are seized and made sensible of their position, there is no foreseeing what turn things may take for him."

It may indeed be said that all this is but to the effect, that Hamlet deems himself justified in resolving, or at all events does resolve, to make sure work, whether the sufferers be or be not really deserving of the fate to which his action sends them. And to this it may be replied that, in those dark complications of crime, Hamlet has no time to weigh nicely the possibilities or likelihoods of innocence on the part of the King's agents; and that he has a perfect right to use whatever fitting and effective means of self-defence the situation puts in his power. It is moreover quite certain that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are at least the *willing* tools of Claudius, caring nothing for the moral complexion of their service, so they may have the honour and the profit of serving him. So that here, again, I may fitly quote Professor Werder:

"The baseness of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern is their ruin: they promenade, so to speak, in the sphere of a fate which involves damnation, without scenting or wishing to scent the sulphur. Where such a king bears rule, his servants are always exposed to the very worst that can befall; and at any moment their ruin may come through circumstances and causes from which nothing may seem more remote than the catastrophe. Whoever serves such a king, and, without any misgiving of his crime, serves him with ready zeal, upon him Hell has a claim; and, if that claim be made good, he has no right to complain. — These are things in which Shakespeare knows no jesting, because he is so great an expounder of the Law, the Divine Law; and he holds to it as no second poet has done."

Intellectually, and morally too, Hamlet is represented as, in the language of our time, much in advance of his

age; his mind casting far onwards to an era of purer, richer, brighter civilization. He conceives a mould of statesmanship, a style of public order, and a tone of social converse, such as the time affords him no examples of. The coarse and brutal manners of his nation, infecting even the Court, he both scorns and deplores, and this on grounds of taste, of policy, of honour, and of right. And the effects which such things have on national character and well-being are discoursed by him with rare discernment and reach of thought. His mind is indeed penetrated with the best efficacies of Christian morality and refinement.

In Shakespeare's time the Drama was an intense national passion, all grades of the English people, from the throne downwards, taking a lively interest in it, and some of the finest gentlemen and choicest spirits of the age lending it their hearty support, apparently regarding it as a powerful engine of public enlightenment and progress: all which was in fact one cause why the Drama came to such a glorious efflorescence in that age. It was therefore in strict keeping with the best thoughts of the time that the Poet made his favourite intellectual hero, prince though he be, deeply versed in the theory of the dramatic art, and much concerned to have the representatives of it well used; as when he tells Polonius, "After your death you were better have a bad epitaph than their ill report while you live." Hamlet's idea seems to be, "Let me have the making of a nation's plays, and I care little who makes its laws." His mind was indeed meant to be large enough, and his taste catholic enough, to include all generous disciplines and liberal preparations in its scope; and Shakespeare evidently thought no scorn to endow such a man with his own exquisite science in the walk which his "sweet and cunning hand" was to render so illustrious.

Laertes makes a very peculiar and most emphatic contrast to Hamlet. He is far indeed from being a noble character, yet he has noble streaks in him. The respect in which

he holds his father, and the entire and unreserved affection he bears his sister, set him well in our esteem as a son and a brother: beyond these he can hardly be said to show any sentiments or principles worthy of regard. He takes as ardently to the gayeties of the French capital as Hamlet does to the studious walks and shades of Wittenberg. Though incapable of any thing so serious as friendship, he is nevertheless a highly companionable fellow, at least among those of like resort. He is never pestered at all with moral scruples: life has no dark and difficult problems to him: he has no philosophy at all, does not even know what the word means: truth, as such, is neither beautiful nor venerable in his sight: in his heat and stress of destructive impulse, he does not see far enough to apprehend any causes for deliberation or delay. In regard to the death of his father, he snatches eagerly at the conclusion shaped for him by the King, without pausing to consider the grounds of it, or to weigh the merits of the case, because it offers a speedy chance of discharging his revenge; and he is reckless alike of means and of consequences, in fact cares nothing for others or even for himself, here or hereafter, so he may quickly ease his breast of the mad rapture with which it is panting. He has a burning resentment of personal wrongs, real or supposed, but no proper sense of justice; indeed, he can nowise enter into any question of so grave a nature as that: hence, in the exigency that overtakes him, "wild sword-law" becomes at once his religion.

The blame of the treacherous plot for assassinating Hamlet, on the express ground of his "being remiss, most generous, and free from all contriving," properly belongs to the King: but the further infamy of anointing his sword in order to clinch the nail of his purpose would go hard with Laertes, but that his trance of passion at Ophelia's madness and death in a great measure, if not entirely, takes away his responsibility. In his transport of grief and rage he is as much beside himself as Hamlet

is in his wildest paroxysms of disorder; and the most suggestive point of contrast between them is in reference to the opposite manner in which the moral character of each transpires under the eclipse of reason. Observe, also, how the two men differ in their ends: Laertes dies repenting of the base and hateful wrong he has done to Hamlet, and begging his forgiveness; Hamlet dies pitying Laertes, and — forgiving him!

Enough, perhaps, has already been said of Claudius; yet there is one further point in his character, so suggestive of wholesome thought, that it ought to receive some passing notice. — The words "all may be well," with which he prologues his act of devotion, are very significant, as showing that his prayer is an attempt to make religion a substitute for duty. As often happens in real life, he betakes himself to a sentimental repentance as absolving him from "doing works meet for repentance." For who has not seen men resorting to very emphatic exercises of religion, as virtually dispensing with the law of good and pious works? It is observable that the King's fit of devotion operates to ease him through his course of crime, instead of deterring him from it. Such are the subtle tricks men practice on themselves, to soothe the pangs of guilt without amendment of life. The King goes from his closet to plot further crimes! Thus his prayer is "like a spendthrift sigh that hurts by easing"; that is to say, he endeavours to satisfy or appease his conscience with a falsetto cry of penitence. Strange it should be so, but so it is!

The Ghost is a powerful element in this great drama, shedding into it a peculiar and preternatural grandeur; but that power acts through the finest organs of the soul, working so deeply on the moral and imaginative forces, that the coarse arts of criticism can do but little with it. What an air of dread expectancy waits upon the coming

and the motions of that awful shade! How grave and earnest, yet how calm and composed its speech! as if it came indeed from the other world, and brought the lessons of that world in its mouth. The stately walk, the solemn, slowly-measured words, the unearthly cast and temper of the discourse, are all ghost-like. The popular currency of many of the Ghost's sayings shows how profoundly they sink into our souls, and what a weight of ethical meaning attaches to them. Observe, too, how choicely Horatio hits the key-note of the part, and attempers us to its influences:

> "What art thou, that usurp'st this time of night,
> Together with that fair and warlike form
> In which the majesty of buried Denmark
> Did sometime march?"

But indeed the whole matter preparatory to the Ghost's interview with Hamlet, its first appearance on the scene, its sad and silent steps, its fading at the crowing of the cock, and the subdued reflections that follow, ending with the speech,

> "But look, the Morn, in russet mantle clad,
> Walks o'er the dew of yond high eastern hill";—

all this is managed with consummate judgment.

Horatio is one of the very noblest and most beautiful of Shakespeare's male characters. There is not a single loose stitch in his make-up: he is at all times superbly self-contained: he feels deeply, but never gushes nor runs over: as true as a diamond, as modest as a virgin, and utterly unselfish; a most manly soul, full alike of strength, tenderness, and solidity. But he moves so quietly in the drama, that his rare traits of character have received scant justice. Much of the best spirit and efficacy of the scenes is owing to his presence. He is the medium whereby some of the hero's finest and noblest qualities are conveyed to us; yet himself so clear and transparent, that he scarcely

catches the attention. The great charm of his unselfishness is, that he seems not to be himself in the least aware of it; "as one, in suffering all, that suffers nothing." His mild scepticism "touching the dreaded sight twice seen of us" is exceedingly graceful and scholarly. And, indeed, all that comes from him marks the presence of a calm, clear head keeping touch and time perfectly with a good heart.

Polonius is Shakespeare's version, sharply individualized, of a politician somewhat past his faculties; shrewd, careful, conceited, meddlesome, and pedantic. Hamlet does him some injustice; partly as thinking that the old man has wantonly robbed him of his heart's best object, and not making due allowance, as indeed lovers seldom do in such cases, for the honest though perhaps erring solicitude of a father's love. Therewithal he looks upon him as a supple time-server and ducking observant, which indeed he is, of whoever chances to be in power, ever ready to "crook the pregnant hinges of the knee where thrift may follow fawning." As such he of course has the utmost contempt for him; which contempt his disease lets loose from the bands of respect, while his intellect engineers it with the greatest fluency and point.

Polonius has his mind richly stored with prudential and politic wisdom; which however shows somewhat absurdly in him, because, to use a figure of Coleridge's, it is like a light in the stern of a ship, that illumines only that part of the course already left behind. For, as Dr. Johnson aptly remarks, he is "knowing in retrospect, and ignorant in foresight." A man of one method, political engineering; with his fingers ever itching to work the machine of policy; and with little perception of times and occasions; he is called to act where such arts and methods are peculiarly unfitting, and therefore he overreaches himself.

To such a mind the hero's character can hardly be other than an inscrutable enigma. It takes a whole man to un-

derstand Hamlet, and Polonius is but the attic storey of a man! Assuming Hamlet to be thus and so, Polonius reasons and acts just right in regard to him; but the fact is, he cannot *see* him; and so, his premises being all wrong, the very justness of his reasoning only carries the further astray. But, in the directions he gives his man Reynaldo for angling out the truth about his absent son, the old politician is perfectly at home; and his mind seems to revel in the mysteries of wire-pulling and trap-setting. He understands, no man better, "how your bait of falsehood takes the carp of truth." But to such modes of dealing Hamlet is quite impracticable. And he takes a mad pleasure in fooling and teasing and plaguing the old fox!

A chronic fanaticism of intrigue having blunted in Polonius the powers of special insight and discernment in what is before him, he therefore perceives not the unfitness of his old methods to the new exigency; while his long experience of success in "hunting the trail of policy" makes him feel quite sure of succeeding now. To quote Dr. Johnson again, "such a man is positive and confident, because he knows that his mind was once strong, but knows not that it has become weak." Antiquated managers, indeed, like Polonius, seldom have much strength but as they fall back upon the resources of memory: out of these, the ashes, so to speak, of extinct faculties, they may appear wise long after the springs of real wisdom are dried up within them; as a man who *has lost his sight* may seem to distinguish colours, provided he does not speak of the particular colours before him.

Polonius has great knowledge of the world; though even here his mind has come to rest mainly in generalities. Accordingly the pithy maxims he gives Laertes, to "character in his memory," are capital in their way; nothing could be better: yet they are but the well-seasoned fruits of general experience and reflection; and there is no apparent reason why he should speak them at that time, except that they were strong in his mind. One would suppose that in such

an act of paternal blessing he would try to breathe some fire of noble sentiment into his son; whereas he thinks of nothing higher than cold precepts of worldly prudence; which seem indeed to be the essence of religion with him. And he imagines that such thoughts will be a sufficient breakwater against the passions of youth!

One of his benedictive precepts to Laertes may well receive some special comment:

> "This above all: To thine own self be true;
> And it must follow, as the night the day,
> Thou canst not then be false to any man."

This is regarded by many as a very high strain of morality. I cannot see it so; though, to be sure, it is as high as Polonius can go: it is the height of worldly wisdom, — a rule of being wisely selfish. In the same sense, "honesty is the best policy"; but no truly honest man ever acts on that principle. A *passion* for rectitude is the only thing that will serve. It is indeed true that we have duties, indispensable duties, to ourselves; that a man ought to be wise for himself. But that the being wise for one's self is the first and highest duty, I do not believe. And the man who makes that the first principle of morality never will and never can be truly wise for himself. Such, however, is the first principle of Polonius's morality; and it is in perfect keeping with the whole of his thoroughly selfish and sinister mind. But he just loses himself by acting upon it. Aiming first of all to be true to himself, he has been utterly false to himself and to his family. Faith, or allegiance, to stand secure, must needs fasten upon something out of and above self. If Polonius had said, "Be true to God, to your country, or to your kind, and it must follow, as the night the day, thou canst not then be false unto thyself," he would have uttered a just and noble thing; but then it would have been quite out of character, and in discord with the whole tenour of his speech. And the old wire-puller, with his double-refined ethics of selfishness, has nothing

venerable about him; while the baseness of Laertes seems to me the legitimate outcome of such moral teachings as those contained so pithily in his father's benediction.

Note, also, what a precious, characteristic specimen of unconscious grannyism he blunders out when he undertakes to explain "the very cause of Hamlet's lunacy." Here, with his hands brimfull of the most serious business, he is pleased, notwithstanding, to spend the time in dallying with artful quirks of thought and speech, — a piece of pedantry and impertinence which has often reminded me of the man who "could speak no sense in several languages." In this instance, again, he shows a good memory of what he had learned at the university; but he manifestly has no live organs to perceive the rights of the occasion. Such is the natural effect of "dotage encroaching upon wisdom."

The pathetic sweetness of Ophelia "divided from herself and her fair judgment" touches the soul with surpassing delicacy. But the touch is full of power withal. Her madness is totally different from Hamlet's; but the delineation of it, so science assures us, is no less true to nature, and evinces an insight no less profound of pathological laws. The violence her feelings suffered in the constrained repulse of her lover after she had "suck'd the honey of his music vows"; her tender grief at his subsequent condition, which is all the greater that she thinks herself the cause of it; the shock of her father's sudden and violent death, — the father whom she loves with such religious entireness, — and this by the hand of that same lover, and in consequence of the madness into which, as she believes, her own action has cast him; — all these causes join in producing her lapse of reason, and all reappear more or less in what comes from her afterwards. Her insanity is complete, unconscious, and such as, it is said, never ends but with the sufferer's death. There is no method in it: she is like one walking and talking in her

sleep; her mind still busy, but its sources of activity all within; literally "incapable of her own distress." The verses she sings are fragments of old ballads which she had heard in her childhood, when she understood not the meaning of them, and which had faded from her memory, but are now revived just enough for her inward eye to catch the words. The immodesty of some of them is surpassingly touching, because it tells us, as nothing else could, that she is utterly unconscious of what she is saying. The fine threads of association by which they are now brought to her mind may be felt, but cannot be described. And the sweet, guileless, gentle spirit of the dear girl casts a tender sanctity over the whole expression.

This delineation shows the Poet under an aspect very peculiar and well worth the noting. His genius here appears literally angelic in its steps and tones of purity and reverence and human-heartedness. He gives just enough to start our tenderest sympathies, but nothing to entertain a prurient curosity; barely hinting the nature of the disease, and then drawing the veil of silence over it, like some protecting spirit of humanity, sent to guard its sacredest possessions from unholy eyes and irreverent hands. In all this we have what may be fitly termed the Shakespeare of Shakespeare; — I mean, his ineffable delicacy and cleanness of moral perception, and his angelic awe of moral beauty.

The central idea or formal cause of Ophelia's character stands in perfect simplicity, — the pure whiteness of perfect truth. This is her wisdom, — the wisdom, not of reflection, but of instinctive reason, — a spontaneous beating of her heart in unison with the soul of Nature, and all the better for being so. And her free docility to paternal counsel and full submission to paternal command are in no sort the result of weakness; filial duty and filial affection being the native element of her young life; so that she instinctively shrinks from forsaking that element, and indeed never thinks of doing so, any more than she does of disowning the laws of gravity and respiration.

Some critics of our time, especially lady critics, have been rather hard on Ophelia for her conduct in this particular: they think it shows her to be a very insipid, pulpy structure, and would have her stand on her woman's rights, and outface the old gentleman. But it has never struck me so: I do not think any the worse of Ophelia, it does not seem to me either blameworthy or scornworthy, that she obeys her father so unreservedly; though, to be sure, she has no idea how much the act is going to cost her; but, if she knew it ever so well, she would obey just the same: for, indeed, the sentiment of filial reverence is very deep and strong in her. Then too Polonius loves his daughter, at least she thinks he does; and he is older than she, at least she thinks he is: she is in fact the only being on Earth that he cares more for than for himself: she has never had any thing but kindness from him; and her mother is not living: so where is the sin, where the shame, if she also cares less for herself than for him? But, indeed, all forms of obedience are very unpopular with us democrats; the very thought of subordination is highly distasteful to us; our wisdom turns up her nose at it as something mean. I understand there are now no disobedient children among us, though it is said there are some rather disobedient parents. Now this latter is very bad indeed; for, surely, if the family is to survive at all, there must, yes, *must* be domestic obedience somewhere. Doubtless it is better that the parents should obey the children than that obedience should be banished the home altogether; better that the house should be inverted, and poised on the ridge-pole, than that it should have no leg at all to stand upon. But, with the progressive spirit of the age raining so thick upon us, it is to be hoped that husbands and fathers will soon soak up enough of it to put them right in this matter. Where is our preposterous, or our sublime, individualism going to end? As things are now speeding, men will soon have to be "authors of themselves, and know no other kin."

Ophelia is an intelligent girl, decidedly so, though not at all intellectual or strong-minded: whenever she speaks, she does it with exquisite grace and propriety. In mind she may indeed be called rather commonplace: but she has good sense; and very few of us have any thing better than that. She is intelligent in her feelings, as she is also sensitive in her intelligence; that is, she both thinks feelingly and feels thoughtfully. Now I rather like this; at least as exemplified in Ophelia: it seems altogether fitting and natural in her, — a fresh suffusion of sweetness and loveliness, I may almost say, of holiness, in her composition. Perhaps such a thing ought not to be spoken at this time; but I am apt to be a very naughty boy, as the reader has probably found me; so I will out with it. A truly intelligent woman — and I have known many such — is my supreme delight among all the creatures on the planet: but intellectual or strong-minded women are not to my taste; in fact, I think they are horrid. Nor do I like intellectual men much better: for, according to my experience, they are generally men of feeble intellect, at least comparatively so; and because they are weak in intellect, therefore they take special pride or pleasure in seeing their intellects at play; which men of strong intellect never do. Why, they will wrangle the life out of any one who differs from them in opinion; nay, if you agree with them, they will instantly take the other side, differ from themselves, for the sake of wrangling. And they are commonly so entertained with their play of intellect, that they cannot hear any thing you say to them: and they are never happy, till they make you feel and own their superiority; — all, no doubt, from a benevolent wish to keep you from being conceited. Besides, intellectuality in itself is not always lovely: often it is very unlovely, sometimes exceedingly mean, sometimes decidedly hateful, nay, sometimes utterly abominable, as in the case of Iago. On the other hand, loveliness is always lovely; and what is lovely all natural-hearted men, and women too, will love; their souls instinctively gravi-

tate towards it; and, if they can, they will cleave to it, and make their home with it.

It used to be thought that the women were morally superior to the men; and so, I am sure, they have been, generally, in times past. But I am told, — I cannot vouch for the truth of it, but I am told, — that in our day the women, at least the more advanced portion of them, have come to spurn at this old imputation of moral superiority; that nothing but an admitted intellectual superiority will content them; that mere equality in this respect will not do. But I still hope that this which I am told is not true. For mankind, let me tell you, have been, are, and will be governed far more by moral power or influence than by intellectual: indeed the world would go to the bad very fast, if it were not so; for intellectual pride is the very soul of diabolism. And, if the world have really come to that pass, if intellectual power be higher in our regard than moral power, then, assuredly, we shall all of us either cheat or be cheated with a shallow, windy, barren, boastful intellectualism; all the deeper springs of the soul being either scorched and dried up, or else corrupted into issues of virulence. Now moral power acts, or is expressed, far more movingly, far more effectively, in obeying than in commanding. So it was with the greatest moral power that ever entered into our world: obedience even unto death was the form and process of it. And moral power has its seat chiefly in the heart: it cannot be transferred to the head; and, if we insist on working through such a transfer, we shall simply wreck both head and heart; or rather we shall have a crop of frozen hearts and boiling heads, both the heat and the cold being in the wrong places. And this, I take it, is one of the reasons, perhaps the main reason, why the continual straining after intellectuality in our education is spoiling the boys and — killing the girls.

Besides, where would be the advantage, where the improvement, if all the internal lines of difference between

man and woman should be effaced and done away? In that case, each would be, inwardly, a mere repetition of the other, not a complement or even a supplement to the other. Would their mutual attraction, their mutual benefit, their mutual happiness be furthered thereby? Why, they would then have no need of each other, would be no addition to each other; and it were best they should keep as far apart as possible; for their union would only be one of mutual discord and repulsion. Their inward diversity of tone, — this it is that makes all the deepest, richest, most eloquent music of their life: pitch their voices to the same key, and put them to singing the same part, and all that harmony which the gods themselves delight to hear would be lost. And so, at least on our side of the social house, the old notion still lives, that man is, or ought to be, superior in strength, woman in sweetness; and it is an old article of faith with me that sweetness is the higher, diviner, more potent force of the two. And if the women are to insist on having the strength, they may as well make up their mind to be without the sweetness. This would indeed be a great loss to us: would it be any gain to them? I doubt it; and I even suspect that those who are making a special effort to wrestle themselves into strength are, *in fact*, wrestling themselves out of sweetness; and this too without getting the strength.

So that, perhaps, on the whole, we cannot do better than let the lines of difference between man and woman remain as wise old mother Nature seems to have drawn them. But especially I think we should all do well to beware how we undertake to supersede or overrule that wisdom of the heart which, to my taste, Ophelia, in her loving, self-sacrificing obedience, rather sweetly illustrates. Indeed I love the dear girl much, as most of those about her do; and in teaching me this love she gives me better instruction out of the heart into the heart than any woman or any man can ever give me out of the head into the head.

As Ophelia has been slurred for her unresisting submis-

sion to paternal order, so Hamlet has been sneered and poohed at for falling or growing in love with Ophelia, and for spending some part of his time in her company, when he has such grave matters to be thinking of. Alas, our impugners of the bad times past, and prophets of the good time coming, are very hard to please! Why, Ophelia is the only pure, sweet, honourable form of humanity about the Court; and Hamlet naturally craves communion with her as a relief from the oppressive, sickening foulness of the place. She is the one sole beam of light and joy in his social whereabout, and his clear, earnest eyes cannot forego the solace of that. Amidst stifling airs and grating sounds, where he can feel nothing but weariness and disgust, where his spirit is in exile, and is pining for its home, her presence is an islet of rest and comfort, where the flowers are laughing and the birds are singing, — a spot as pure and fresh as Aurora's blush, as soft, as balmy, as fragrant as Vesper's purpling hour: and how can he, with his sorrowing human heart, do otherwise than fly to the verdure and refreshment of it? Surely he were something more or less than a man, did he not love to breathe and linger, now and then, in such a pavilion of innocence and loveliness.

Ophelia's situation much resembles Imogen's; their characters are in marked contrast. Both appear amidst the corruptions of a wicked Court, and both pass through them unhurt; the one because she knows not of them, the other because she both knows and hates them. And the reason why Ophelia knows not of them is because her simplicity of character makes her susceptive only of that which is simple.

The space Ophelia fills in the reader's thoughts is strangely disproportionate to that which she fills in the play. Her very silence utters her; unseen, she is missed, and so thought of the more; in her absence she is virtually present in what others bring from her. Whatever grace comes from Polonius and the Queen is of her inspiring:

Laertes is scarce regarded but as he loves his sister: of Hamlet's soul, too, she is the sunrise and morning hymn. The soul of innocence and gentleness, virtue radiates from her insensibly, as fragrance is exhaled from flowers. It is in such forms that Heaven most frequently visits us.

Ophelia is seen at the period of extreme sensitiveness to impressions from without. Accordingly her thoughts are so engaged on external objects as to leave no room for introversion or self-inspection. From the lips and eyes of Hamlet she has drunk in the pledges of his love, but has never heard the voice of her own; and she knows not how full her heart is of Hamlet, because she has not a single motion there at strife with him. Her silence on this point has sometimes been misderived from a wish to hide her love from others; whereas in truth she is not aware of it herself; and she unconsciously betrays it in the blushing reluctance with which she yields up the secret of Hamlet's addresses to her. The extorted confession of what she has received reveals how much she has given; the soft tremblings of her bosom being made the plainer by the delicate lawn of silence wimpled over it. Even when her young soul is breaking into a total wreck, she seems not to know the reason of it; and the truth comes out only when her mind, which once breathed such soft and womanly music, lies in fragments before us, and the secrets of her maiden heart are hovering on her unconscious lips.

As before observed, one of the bitterest ingredients in Ophelia's cup is the belief that by her repulse of Hamlet —him whose eyes "to the last bended their light on me" — she has dismantled his fair and stately house of reason. And when, forgetting the wounds with which her own spirit is bleeding, over "that unmatch'd form and feature of blown youth blasted with ecstasy," she meets his, "I loved you not," with the sigh, "I was the more deceived," we see that she feels not the sundering of the ties that bind her faculties in harmony.

Ophelia's insanity is one of those mysterious visitings

over which we can only brood in dumb compassion; which Heaven alone has a heart adequately to pity, and a hand effectually to heal. Its pathos were too much to be borne, but for the incense that rises from her crushed spirit as she turns "thought and affliction, passion, Hell itself to favour and to prettiness." — Of her death what shall be said? The "snatches of old tunes" with which she chaunts, as it were, her own burial service, are like smiles raying from the heart of woe. I must leave her with the words of Hazlitt: "O rose of May! O flower too soon faded! Her love, her madness, her death are described with the truest touches of tenderness and pathos. It is a character which nobody but Shakespeare could have drawn, and to the conception of which there is not the smallest approach, except in some of the old romantic ballads."

The Queen's affection for this lovely being is one of those unexpected strokes of art, so frequent in Shakespeare, which surprise us into reflection by their naturalness. That Ophelia should disclose a vein of goodness in the Queen, was necessary, perhaps, to keep us both from misprising the influence of the one and from exaggerating the wickedness of the other. The love she thus inspires tells us that her helplessness springs from innocence, not from weakness, and so prevents the pity which her condition moves from lessening the respect due to her character.

Almost any other author would have depicted Gertrude without a single alleviating trait. Beaumont and Fletcher would probably have made her simply frightful or loathsome, and capable only of exciting abhorrence or disgust; if, indeed, in her monstrous depravity she had not rather failed to excite any feeling. Shakespeare, with far more effect as well as far more truth, exhibits her with such a mixture of good and bad as neither disarms censure nor precludes pity. Herself dragged along in the terrible train of consequences which her own guilt had a hand in starting, she is hurried away into the same dreadful abyss along

with those whom she loves, and against whom she has sinned. In her tenderness towards Hamlet and Ophelia we recognize the virtues of the mother without in the least palliating the guilt of the wife; while the crimes in which she is a partner almost disappear in those of which she is the victim.

This play has many and varied scenic excellences, of which only a few of the less obvious need be specified. — In the platform scenes the chills of a northern winter midnight seem creeping over us as the heartsick sentinels pass in view, and, steeped in moonlight and drowsiness, exchange their meeting and parting salutations. The thoughts and images that rise up in their minds are just such as the anticipation of preternatural visions would be likely to inspire. And the sensations one has in reading these scenes are not unlike those of a child passing a graveyard by moonlight. Out of the dim and drowsy moonbeams apprehension creates its own objects; the fancies embody themselves in surrounding facts; fears giving shape to outward things, while those things give outwardness to the fears. — The heterogeneous, oddly-assorted elements that are brought together in the grave-digging scene; the strange mixture of songs and witticisms and dead-men's bones, and the still stranger transitions of the sprightly, the meditative, the solemn, the playful, the grotesque, make up such a combination as Shakespeare only could conceive. Here we have the hero's profound discourse of thought, his earnest moral reflectiveness, and his most idiomatic humour, all working out together. As illustrating his whole character, in all its depth and complexity, the scene is one of the richest and wisest in the play.

Of all the Poet's dramas, this probably combines the greatest strength and diversity of powers. In the hero himself we have little less than the whole science of human nature drawn together and condensed.

And the drama, in other respects, is well in keeping with

this varied profusion of matter in Hamlet. Sweeping round the whole circle of human thought and passion, its alternations of amazement and fear; of lust and ambition and remorse; of hope, love, friendship, anguish, madness, and despair; of wit, humour, pathos, poetry, and philosophy; now congealing the blood with terror, now melting the heart with pity, now launching the mind into eternity, now startling conscience from her lonely seat with supernatural visitings; — it unfolds a world of truth and beauty and sublimity.

In view of the moral incongruities here displayed, especially in the catastrophe, Goethe has the following weighty sentence: "It is the tendency of crime to spread its evils over innocence, as it also is of virtue to diffuse its blessings over many who deserve them not; while, frequently, the author of the one or of the other is not punished or rewarded." Which aptly suggests the moral scope and significance of the drama. From the appalling discrepancies involved in such a course of administration, there is, there can be, but one refuge. What that refuge is the play does not fail to tell us; and it tells us by the mouth of him who has most cause to dread what his guilt-burdened conscience forecasts so profoundly:

> "In the corrupted 'currents of this world,
> Offence's gilded hand may shove-by justice;
> And oft 'tis seen the wicked prize itself
> Buys out the law: but 'tis not so above;
> There is no shuffling, there the action lies
> In his true nature; and we ourselves compell'd,
> Even to the teeth and forehead of our faults,
> To give-in evidence."

May, 1882.

MACBETH.

The Tragedy of Macbeth was first printed in the folio of 1623, where it stands the seventh in the division of tragedies. On the 8th of November, that year, it was registered at the Stationers' by Blount and Jaggard, as one of the plays "not formerly entered to other men."

The text of this drama has come down to us in a state far from satisfactory. Though not so badly printed as some other plays in the same volume, for instance, *All's Well that Ends Well* and *Coriolanus*, still it has a number of very troublesome passages. In several cases, the errors are of such a nature that we can hardly refer them to any other than a phonographic origin. On this point, the learned editors of the Clarendon edition observe as follows: "Probably it was printed from a transcript of the author's manuscript, which was in great part not copied from the original, but written to dictation. This is confirmed by the fact that several of the most palpable blunders are blunders of the ear, and not of the eye."

The minute and searching criticism of our time has made out, almost, if not altogether, beyond question, that considerable portions of *Macbeth* were not written by Shakespeare. I have been very slow and reluctant to admit this conclusion; but the evidence, it seems to me, is not to be withstood. It is, moreover, highly probable, to say the least, that few of the scenes, perhaps none, have reached us altogether in the form they received from the Poet's hand.

The date of the composition has been variously argued and concluded. Until a recent period, there was nothing but internal evidence at hand for settling the date. Proceeding upon this, Malone and Chalmers agreed upon the year 1606 as the *probable* time of the writing. That the composition was subsequent to the union of the English and Scottish crowns, was justly inferred from what the hero says in his last interview with the Weird Sisters: "And some I see, that *twofold balls* and *treble sceptres* carry." James the

First came to the throne of England in March, 1603; but the two crowns were not *formally* united, at least the union was not proclaimed, till October, 1604.

Our earliest authentic notice of *Macbeth* is from one Simon Forman, M.D., an astrologer, quack, and dealer in the arts of magic, who kept a sort of diary which he entitled *The Book of Plays and Notes thereof*. In 1836 the manuscript of this diary was discovered in the Ashmolean Museum, and a portion of its contents published. Forman gives a somewhat minute and particular account of the plot and leading incidents of the drama, as he saw it played at the Globe theatre on Saturday the 20th of April, 1610. The passage is too long for my space; but it is a very markworthy circumstance, that from the way it begins, and from the wording of it, we should naturally infer that what now stands as the first scene of the play, then made no part of the performance. The passage opens thus: "In *Macbeth*, at the Globe, 1610, the 20th of April, Saturday, there was to be observed, first, how, Macbeth and Banquo, two noblemen of Scotland, riding through a wood, there stood before them three women, fairies or nymphs, and saluted Macbeth, saying three times unto him, Hail," &c.

It is highly probable, to say the least, that the tragedy was then fresh from the Poet's hand, and was in its first course of performance. Some arguments, indeed, or seeming arguments, have been adduced, inferring the play to have been written three or four years earlier; but I can see no great force in them. On the other hand, it appears that Forman had long been an habitual frequenter of playhouses; and it seems nowise likely that one so eager in quest of novelties would either have missed the play, had it been put upon the stage before, or have made so special a notice of it, but that he then saw it for the first time. Nor have the characteristics of the work itself any thing to say against the date in question; those portions of it that have the clearest and most unquestionable impress of Shakespeare's hand being in his greatest, richest, most idiomatic style.

The drama yields some cause, in the accuracy of local description and allusion, for thinking that the Poet had been in Scotland. Nor are these internal likelihoods unsustained by external arguments. Companies of English players are known to have visited Scotland several times during Shakespeare's connection with the stage. The English ambassador at the Scottish Court in 1589 wrote to Lord Treasurer Burleigh how "my Lord Bothwell showeth great kindness to our nation, using *her Majesty's players* with all courtesy." Archbishop Spottiswood, also, writing the history of the year 1599, gives the following: "In the end of the year happened some new jars betwixt the King and the ministers of Edinburgh, because of a company of English comedians whom the King had licensed to play within the burgh. The ministers, being offended with the liberty given them, did exclaim in their sermons against stage-players; and in their sessions made an Act prohibiting people to resort to their plays, under pain of Church censures. The King, taking this to be a discharge of his license, called the sessions before the Council, and ordained them to annul their Act, and not to restrain the people from going to these comedies; which they promised, and accordingly performed." The public records of Scotland show, also, that English players were liberally rewarded by the King on several occasions in 1600 and 1601. And the registers of Aberdeen inform us that the same players were received by the public authorities of that place, under the sanction of a special letter from the King, styling them "our servants." There, too, they had a reward in cash; and the freedom of the city was conferred on "Laurence Fletcher, Comedian to his Majesty"; he being, no doubt, the leader of the company. Next, we have a patent made out by the King's order, May 7, 1603, authorizing Laurence Fletcher, William Shakespeare, Richard Burbage, and others, to perform plays in any part of the kingdoms. In this instrument the players are termed "our servants," — the same style which the King had used to the authorities

of Aberdeen. All which, to be sure, does not prove the Poet to have been of the number who were in Scotland; still I think that, coupled with the internal likelihoods of the play itself, it may fairly be held to warrant a belief to that effect, there being no evidence to the contrary.

The story of Macbeth, as it lived in tradition, had been told by Holinshed, whose *Chronicles* first appeared in 1577, and by George Buchanan, the learned preceptor of James the First, who has been termed the Scotch Livy, and whose *History of Scotland* came forth in 1582. The main features of the story, so far as it is adopted by the Poet, are the same in both these writers, save that Buchanan represents Macbeth to have merely dreamed of meeting the Weird Sisters, and of being hailed by them successively as Thane of Angus, Thane of Murray, and as King. Holinshed was Shakespeare's usual authority in matters of British history. In the present case the Poet shows no traces of obligation to Buchanan, unless, which is barely possible, he may have taken a hint from the historian, where the latter, speaking of Macbeth's reign, says, "Certain of our writers here relate many idle things which I omit, as being fitter for Milesian fables or *for the theatre* than for sober history." A passage which, as showing the author's care for the truth of what he wrote, perhaps should make us wary of trusting too much in later writers, who would have us believe that, a war of factions breaking out, Duncan was killed in battle, and Macbeth took the crown by just and lawful title. And it is considerable that both Hume and Lingard acquiesce in the old account which represents Macbeth to have murdered Duncan, and usurped the throne.

According to the history, Malcolm, King of Scotland, had two daughters, Beatrice and Doada, severally married to Abanath Crinen and to Sinel, Thanes of the Isles and of Glamis, by whom each had a son named Duncan and Macbeth. The former succeeded his grandfather in the kingdom; and, he being of a soft and gentle disposition, his

reign was at first very quiet and peaceable, but afterwards, by reason of his slackness, was greatly harassed with troubles and seditions, wherein his cousin, who was of a valiant and warlike spirit, did great service to the State.

Instead of giving at length the wordy narration of Holinshed, I must, for economy of space, condense the main particulars of the historic matter. After narrating the victory of the Scottish generals over the rebels and invaders, the chronicler proceeds in substance as follows:

Macbeth and Banquo were on their way to Forres, where the King then lay; and, as they were passing through the fields alone, three women in strange and wild attire suddenly met them; and, while they were rapt with wonder at the sight, the first said, "All hail, Macbeth, Thane of Glamis"; the second, "Hail, Macbeth, Thane of Cawdor"; the third, "Hail, Macbeth, that hereafter shalt be King." Then said Banquo, "What manner of women are you, that to my fellow here, besides high offices, ye assign the kingdom, but promise nothing to me?" "Yes," said the first, "we promise greater things to thee: for he shall reign indeed, but shall have no issue to succeed him; whereas thou indeed shalt not reign, but from thee shall spring a long line of kings." Then the women immediately vanished. At first the men thought this was but a fantastical illusion, insomuch that Banquo would call Macbeth king in jest, and Macbeth in like sort would call him father of many kings. But afterwards the women were believed to be the Weird Sisters; because, the Thane of Cawdor being condemned for treason, his lands and titles were given to Macbeth. Whereupon Banquo said to him jestingly, "Now, Macbeth, thou hast what two of the Sisters promised; there remaineth only what the other said should come to pass." And Macbeth began even then to devise how he might come to the throne, but thought he must wait for time to work his way, as in the former preferment. But when, shortly after, the King made his oldest son Prince of Cumberland, thereby in effect appointing him suc-

cessor, Macbeth was sorely troubled thereat, as it seemed to cut off his hope; and, thinking the purpose was to defeat his title to the crown, he studied to usurp it by force. Encouraged by the words of the Weird Sisters, and urged on by his wife, who was "burning with unquenchable desire to bear the name of queen," he at length whispered his design to some trusty friends, and, having a promise of their aid, slew the King at Inverness; then got himself proclaimed king, and forthwith went to Scone, where, by common consent, he was invested after the usual manner.

The circumstances of the murder, as set forth in the play, were taken from another part of the history, where Holinshed relates how King Duff, being the guest of Donwald and his wife in their castle at Forres, was there murdered. The story ran as follows: King Duff having retired for the rest of the night, his two chamberlains, as soon as they saw him well a-bed, came forth, and fell to banqueting with Donwald and his wife, who had prepared many choice dishes and drinks for their rear-supper; wherewith they so gorged themselves, that their heads no sooner got to the pillow than they were so fast asleep that the chamber might have been removed without waking them. Then Donwald, goaded on by his wife, though in heart he greatly abhorred the act, called four of his servants, whom he had already framed to the purpose with large gifts; and they, entering the King's chamber, cut his throat as he lay asleep, and carried the body forth into the fields. In the morning, a noise being made that the King was slain, Donwald ran thither with the watch, as though he knew nothing of it, and, finding cakes of blood in the bed and on the floor, forthwith slew the chamberlains as guilty of the murder.

The body of Duncan was conveyed to Colmekill, and there laid in a sepulchre amongst his predecessors, in the year 1040. Malcolm and Donalbain, the sons of Duncan, for fear of their lives fled into Cumberland, where Malcolm remained till Saint Edward recovered England from the

Danish power. Edward received Malcolm with most friendly entertainment, but Donalbain passed over into Ireland, where he was tenderly cherished by the King of that land.

Macbeth, after the departure of Duncan's sons, used great liberality towards the nobles of the realm, thereby to win their favour; and, when he saw that no man went about to trouble him, he set his whole endeavour to maintain justice, and to punish all enormities and abuses which had chanced through the feeble administration of Duncan. He continued governing the realm for the space of ten years in equal justice: but this was but a counterfeit zeal, to purchase thereby the favour of the people. Shortly after, he began to show what he was, practising cruelty instead of equity. For the prick of conscience caused him ever to fear, lest he should be served with the same cup as he had ministered to his predecessor. The words, also, of the Weird Sisters would not out of his mind; which, as they promised him the kingdom, did likewise promise it at the same time to the posterity of Banquo. He therefore desired Banquo and his son named Fleance to come to a supper that he had prepared for them; but hired certain murderers to meet them without the palace as they returned to their lodgings, and there to slay them. Yet it chanced, by the benefit of the dark night, that, though the father was slain, the son escaped that danger; and afterwards, having some inkling how his life was sought no less than his father's, to avoid further peril he fled into Wales.

After the slaughter of Banquo, nothing prospered with Macbeth. For every man began to doubt his own life, and durst hardly appear in the King's presence: and as there were many that stood in fear of him, so likewise stood he in fear of many, in such sort that he began to make those away whom he thought most able to work him any displeasure. At length he found such sweetness in putting his nobles to death, that his thirst after blood might

nowise be satisfied. For, first, they were rid out of the way whom he feared; then, his coffers were enriched by their goods, whereby he might the better maintain a guard of armed men about him, to defend his person from them whom he had in any suspicion.

Holinshed also relates, at considerable length, the interview between Macduff and Malcolm at the English Court, setting forth the particulars of their talk in the same order, and partly in the same words, as we have them in the Poet's text.

As before remarked, the original copy prints *Macbeth* in the division of Tragedies. Yet the foregoing sketch shows its frame-work to be in great part made of historic material. For this cause, several modern editors have taken it out of the division of Tragedies, and transferred it to that of Histories; an order clearly and entirely wrong. *Hamlet*, also, and *King Lear* have something of an historical basis, though not so much as *Macbeth*. But in all three the historical matter is so merged in the form and transfigured with the spirit of Tragedy, as to put it wellnigh out of thought to class them as histories, since this is subjecting them to wrong tests, and implies the right to censure them for not being what they were never meant to be. They are tragedies, and nothing else. So, it appears, the Poet himself called them; and in the use of words "he knew his cue without a prompter." Historic truth was not his aim, nor any part of his aim, in the construction of them; and whatever of history they contain is used not at all as forming or guiding the plot, but merely as subserving it. So that they are to be viewed simply as works of art; and the only proper question respecting them is, whether and how far they have that truth to Nature, that organic proportion and self-consistency, which the laws of Art require.

Every one ripely conversant with Shakespeare's manner, and thoroughly at home in his idiom of thought and language, must, I think, have at least a dim sense, if not a

clear perception, of disharmony and incongruity in certain portions of this tragedy. Many years ago I had something of this feeling; but, as the whole play was then universally ascribed to Shakespeare, I did not dare to trust such feeling: I sought, and of course easily found, refuge from it in the thought, that Shakespeare, even in his wisest days, was not wise at all hours, and that in his highest hours he had occasional moments of nodding, as Homer is said to have; and that, in his serene carelessness, or perhaps in his calm assurance, or fame, both his genius and his taste indulged themselves now and then in rather emphatic lapses.

The feeling in question was first moved by the wide contrast between what comes from the Witches, in Act i., scene 3, before the entrance of Macbeth and Banquo, and what comes from the Weird Sisters after that entrance. The difference is not merely one of degree, but of kind; a difference as broad and as pronounced as that between a tadpole and an eagle. In the former case, they are neither more nor less than the coarse, foul old-woman witches of ancient superstition; creatures actuated by the worst and lowest human motives and passions, envy, malice, and spite; killing swine, sailing in sieves, assuming the forms of rats without tails, dealing in the thumbs of wrecked pilots, and riding through the air on broomsticks. Their aspect and behaviour are in the last degree commonplace and vulgar; there is nothing even respectable about them; all is of the earth earthy. In the latter case, they are mysterious and supernatural beings, unearthly and terrible, such as we may well conceive "the Goddesses of Destiny" to be: their very aspect at once strikes the beholder with dread and awe: they do not come and go, they appear and vanish; bubbling up, as it were, through the ground from the lower world, in something of a human shape, to breathe the contagion of Hell upon a soul which they know to be secretly in sympathy with them, and inwardly attempered to their purposes. Surely every one who reads that scene, with his thoughts about him, must catch at least some glimpses of this wide discrepancy.

Thomas Middleton has a play called *The Witch*, wherein are delineated with considerable skill the vulgar hags of old superstition, whose delight it was to "raise jars, jealousies, strifes, and heart-burning disagreements, like a thick scurf o'er life." The relation between Middleton's piece and Shakespeare's tragedy is an interesting theme indeed, but too long for presentation here; and the former is referred to as not unaptly introducing the peculiar and subordinate use which the Poet makes of the old witchcraft lore in the delineation and the machinery of his Weird Sisters. I say the use that he makes of that lore; for the cauldron-scene, in the fourth Act, is unquestionably Shakespeare's work; all, I mean, except those parts where Hecate figures. But the witchcraft language and machinery there drawn upon is penetrated with a soul-appalling efficacy, and dominated by a potency of terror, such as old witchcraft never dreamed of.

In sorting the materials out of which the Weird Sisters weave their incantations, and compound their "hell-broth," so as to "make the gruel thick and slab," the Poet gathered and condensed the popular belief of his time. Ben Jonson, whose mind dwelt more in the circumstantial, and who spun his poetry much more out of the local and particular, made a grand showing from the same source in his *Masque of Queens*. But his powers did not permit, nor did his purpose require, him to select and dispose of his materials so as to cause any thing like the mixed impression of the terrible and the grotesque, which is here conveyed. Shakespeare so spins his incantations as to cast a spell upon the mind, and engage its acquiescence in what he represents.

From the subordinate part old witchcraft plays in some portions of the work which are Shakespeare's, and still more, perhaps, from the exclusive part it plays in some portions which are not Shakespeare's, criticism for a long time almost, if not altogether, identified the Weird Sisters with the vulgar old-woman witches of popular belief. It

was reserved for the better critics of our century to set this matter right. "The Weird Sisters," says Coleridge, "are as true a creation of Shakespeare's as his Ariel and Caliban; fates, furies, and materializing witches being the elements. They are wholly different from any representation of witches in the contemporary writers, and yet presented a sufficient external resemblance to the creatures of vulgar prejudice, to act immediately on the audience." Charles Lamb, also, speaks to the same purpose, having the witches of Rowley and Dekker in his eye. "They are," says he, "the plain, traditional, old-woman witches of our ancestors, — poor, deformed, and ignorant, the terror of villages, — themselves amenable to a justice. That should be a hardy sheriff, with the power of the country at his heels, that should lay hands on the Weird Sisters. They are of another jurisdiction." All which, I believe, sufficiently clears the way for what seems to me a right statement of the matter in hand.

The old witches of superstition were foul, ugly, mischievous beings, generally actuated by vulgar envy or hate; not so much wicked as mean, and more apt to excite disgust than to inspire terror or awe; who could inflict injury, but not guilt; and could work men's temporal ruin, but not win them to work their own spiritual ruin. The Weird Sisters are cast in quite another mould, and are beholden to those old witches for little if any thing more than the drapery of the representation. Resembling old women, save that they have long beards, they bubble up in human shape, but own no human relations; are without age, or sex, or kin; without birth or death; passionless and motiveless. A combination of the terrible and the grotesque, unlike the Furies of the Greek Drama they are petrific, not to the senses, but to the thoughts. At first, indeed, on merely looking *at* them, we can scarce help laughing, so uncouth and grotesque is their appearance; but afterwards, on looking into them, we find them terrible beyond description: and the more we look, the more terrible do they become;

the blood almost curdling in our veins, as, dancing, and singing their infernal glees over embryo murders, they unfold to our thoughts the cold, passionless, inexhaustible malignity and deformity of their nature. Towards Macbeth they have nothing of personal hatred or revenge; their malice is of a higher strain, and savours as little of any such human ranklings as the thunder-storms and elemental perturbations amidst which they come and go. Coleridge describes their character as "consisting in the imaginative disconnected from the good"; than which I can scarce frame an idea any thing more dreadful to contemplate. But, with all their essential wickedness, the Weird Sisters have nothing gross or vulgar or sensual about them. "Fair is foul, and foul is fair," to them, by constitution of nature; darkness is their light, storms their sunshine, tumults, terrors, hideous rites, and Satanic liturgies their religion. They are indeed the very purity of sin incarnate; the vestal virgins, so to speak, of Hell; in whom every thing is reversed; whose ascent is downwards; whose proper eucharist is a sacrament of evil; and the law of whose being is violation of law!

In the cauldron scene, most of which is undoubtedly Shakespeare's, it is noteworthy that the Weird Sisters draw rather more into the speech and usage of old witchcraft than seems exactly in keeping with their mysterious and supernatural being. Is there any way of accounting for this, without dispossessing them of their proper character? Let us see.

The Weird Sisters of course have their religion; though, to be sure, that religion is altogether Satanic. For so essential is religion of some kind to all social life and being, that even the society of Hell cannot subsist without it. Now, every religion, whether human or Satanic, has, and must have, a liturgy and ritual of some sort, as its organs of action and expression. The Weird Sisters know, by supernatural ways, that Macbeth is burning to question them further, and that he has resolved to pay them a visit.

To instruct and inspire him in a suitable manner, they arrange to hold a religious service in his presence and behalf. And they fitly employ the language and ritual of witchcraft, as being the only language and ritual which he can understand and take the sense of: they adopt, for the occasion, the sacraments of witchcraft, because these are the only sacraments whereby they can impart to him the Satanic grace and efficacy which it is their office to dispense. The language, however, and ritual of witchcraft are in their use condensed and intensified to the highest degree of potency and impressiveness. Thus their appalling infernal liturgy is a special and necessary accommodation to the senses and the mind of the person they are dealing with. It really seems to me that they had no practicable way but to speak and act in this instance just like witches, only a great deal more so. But, in the Middleton scenes and parts of scenes, they are made to speak and act just like common witches, to no purpose, and without any occasion for it. This is, indeed, to disnature them, to empty them of their selfhood.

It may not be amiss to add, that Shakespeare of course wrote his plays for the stage; but then he also, and in a far deeper and higher sense, wrote them for the human mind. And the divinity of his genius lies pre-eminently in this, that, while he wished to make his workmanship attractive and fruitful in the theatre, he could not choose but make it at the same time potent and delectable in the inner courts of man's intelligent and upward-reaching soul. But this latter service was a thing that Middleton knew nothing of, and had not the heart to conceive.

But is there any thing of permanent truth in the matter of the Weird Sisters? and, if so, what? These are questions that may fairly claim to be considered in any attempt to interpret the drama.

Probably no form of superstition ever prevailed to much extent, but that it had a ground and principle of truth. The old system of witchcraft, I take it, was an embodiment of some natural law, a local and temporary outgrowth from

something as general and permanent as human nature. Our moral being must breathe; and therefore, in default of other provision, it puts forth some such arrangement of breathing-organs spontaneously, just as a tree puts forth leaves. The point of art, then, in the case before us, was to raise and transfigure the literal into the symbolical; to take the body, so brittle and perishable in itself, and endow it with immortality; which could be done only by filling and animating it with the efficacy of imperishable truth. Accordingly the Poet took enough of current and traditionary matter to enlist old credulity in behalf of agents suited to his peculiar purpose; representing to the age its own thoughts, and at the same time informing that representation with a moral significance suited to all ages alike. In *The Witch* of Middleton we have the literal form of a transient superstition; in *Macbeth* that form is made the transparent vehicle of a truth coeval and coextensive with the workings of human guilt. In their literal character the Weird Sisters answer to something that was, and is not; in their symbolical character, they answer to something that was, and is, and will abide; for they represent the mysterious action and reaction between the evil mind and external nature.

For the external world serves in some sort as a looking-glass wherein we behold the image of our inner man. And the evil suggestions, which seems to us written in the face or speaking from the mouth of outward objects and occasions, are in reality but projections from our own evil hearts. In a moral sense, the world around us only gives us back ourselves; its aspect is but a reflection of what we bring to it. So that, if the things we look on seem inviting us to crime, it is only because our depraved lusts and most frail affections construe their innocent meanings into wicked invitations.

In the spirit and virtue of this principle, the Weird Sisters symbolize the inward moral history of each and every man; and therefore they may be expected to live in the faith of reason so long as the present moral order or disorder of

things shall last. So that they may be aptly enough described as poetical or mythical impersonations of evil influences. They body forth in living forms the fearful echo which the natural world gives back to the evil that speaks out from the human heart. And the secret of their power over Macbeth lies mainly in that they present to him his embryo wishes and half-formed thoughts. At one time they harp his fear aright, at another his hope; and this too before his hope and fear have distinctly reported themselves in his consciousness; and, by thus harping them, nurse them into purpose and draw them into act. As men often know they would something, yet know not clearly what they would, till an articulation of it, or what seems such, comes to them from without. For so we are naturally made conscious of what is within us by the shadow it casts in the light of occasion; and therefore it is that trials and opportunities have such an effect in revealing us to ourselves.

All which may serve to suggest the real nature and scope of the Weird influences on the action of the play. The office of the Weird Sisters is not so properly to deprave as to develop the characters whereon they act. They do not create the evil heart, they only untie the evil hands. They put nothing into Macbeth's mind, but merely draw out what was already there; breathing fructification upon his indwelling germs of sin, and thus acting as mediators between the secret upspringing purpose and the final accomplishment of crime. He was already minded to act as he does, only there needed something to "trammel up the consequence"; which, in his apprehension, is just what the Weird Sisters do.

Accordingly it well appears in the course of the play that the thought of murdering Duncan is by no means new to Macbeth. Perhaps I ought to remark here that, as the Scottish crown was elective in a certain line, Macbeth's claim to it was *legally* as good as Duncan's till the vote was declared; while his consciousness of superior fitness for the

office might naturally have filled him with high expectations. At all events, it is plain enough that he has more than dallied with the purpose of retrieving that disappointment by crime; he has entertained it seriously, and has had talks with his wife about it; she no doubt encouraging him in it with all her fiery vehemence of spirit. In his boldness of imagination he was then even ready to make an opportunity for the deed; and it is a profound stroke of nature that, when the opportunity makes itself to his hands, its effect is to unman him. This is evident from his wife's stinging reproaches when at last his resolution falters and breaks down: "Was the hope drunk wherein you 'dress'd yourself?" — "When you durst do it, then you were a man;" and, "Nor time nor place did then adhere, and yet you would make both." These plainly refer to conversations they have formerly, perhaps often, had on the subject.

So that in the salutation of the Weird Sisters Macbeth just meets with an external temptation to that which he has been inwardly tempted or instigated to before. Yet he cannot all at once rest secure in the thoughts which at that prophetic greeting spring up within him; and therefore it is that he "burns in desire to question them further." Fears and scruples as to the consequence still shake him: a general pledge of security is not enough: he craves to know further how and whence the means of safety are to come; his faith in the Weird promise not being strong enough at first to silence the warnings of experience, reinforced as these are by the instinctive apprehensions of conscience:

> "But in these cases
> We still have judgment here; that we but teach
> Bloody instructions, which, being taught, return
> To plague th' inventor: this even-handed justice
> Commends th' ingredients of our poison'd chalice
> To our own lips."

It seems worthy of remark how Buchanan represents the salutations of the Weird Sisters to have been the coinage of

Macbeth's dreams; as if his mind were so swollen with ambitious thoughts, that these haunt his pillow and people his sleep: and afterwards, when a part of the dream came to pass without his help, this put him upon working out a fulfilment of the remainder. Nor, in this view of the matter, is it easy to see but that a dream would every way satisfy the moral demands of the case, though it might not answer the conditions of the drama.

It is wisely ordered that the Weird Sisters meet Macbeth "in the day of success," when the exultations of victory would naturally prompt such a mind as his to catch at ambitious hopes. And "the early birth-date of his guilt" appears in that, on hearing the first Weird salutation, he is instantly seized with a kind of mental delirium. This comes out in what Banquo says:

> "Good sir, why do you start, and seem to fear
> Things that do sound so fair? — I'the name of truth,
> Are ye fantastical? or that indeed
> Which outwardly ye show? My noble partner
> You greet with present grace and great prediction
> Of noble having and of royal hope,
> That he seems rapt withal: to me you speak not.
> If you can look into the seeds of time,
> And say which grain will grow, and which will not,
> Speak then to me, who neither beg not fear
> Your favours nor your hate."

Macbeth's behaviour as here indicated is profoundly symptomatic of his moral predispositions. It is a full revelation of his criminal aptitudes that so startles and surprises him into a rapture of meditation. The Weird greeting is as a spark to a magazine of wickedness in him; and he is at once seized with a trance of terror at the result:

> "Between the acting of a dreadful thing
> And the first motion, all the interim is
> Like a phantasma or a hideous dream:
> The genius and the mortal instruments
> Are then in council; and the state of man

Like to a little kingdom, suffers then
The nature of an insurrection."

"So surely," says Coleridge, "is the guilt in its germ anterior to the supposed cause and immediate temptation." Whether the Weird Sisters "look into the seeds of time" or not, they manifestly look into the seeds of Macbeth's character; and they drop just the right stuff on them to make them sprout, as is evident from the fact that they instantly do sprout. And it was their insight of the unhatched eggs of evil within him, that drew them to him.

Macbeth has another like trance of guilty thought and terror, when the messengers come from the King, and hail him Thane of Cawdor, and thus give his faith a fresh start against the misgivings of prudence and conscience:

"*Macb.* [*To himself.*] Glamis, and Thane of Cawdor!
The greatest is behind. — Thanks for your pains. —
[*To* BANQ.] Do you not hope your children shall be kings,
When those that gave the Thane of Cawdor to me
Promised no less to them?
Banq. [*To* MACB.] That, trusted home,
Might yet enkindle you unto the crown,
Beside the Thane of Cawdor. But 'tis strange:
And oftentimes, to win us to our harm,
The instruments of darkness tell us truths;
Win us with honest trifles, to betray us
In deepest consequence.
Macb. [*To himself.*] Two truths are told,
As happy prologues to the swelling act
Of the imperial theme! — I thank you, gentlemen. —
[*To himself.*] This supernatural soliciting
Cannot be ill, — cannot be good: — if ill,
Why hath it given me earnest of success,
Commencing in a truth? I'm Thane of Cawdor:
If good, why do I yield to that suggestion
Whose horrid image doth unfix my hair,
And make my seated heart knock at my ribs,
Against the use of nature? Present fears
Are less than horrible imaginings:
My thought, whose murder yet is but fantastical,
Shakes so my single state of man, that function

Is smother'd in surmise, and nothing is,
But what is not.
Banq. Look, how our partner's rapt. —
Worthy Macbeth, we stay upon your leisure.
Macb. Give me your favour: my dull brain was wrought
With things forgotten."

Macbeth's rapture here is the same as in the preceding instance, only running to a higher pitch. And it tells with startling emphasis how greedily the "swelling evil of his conception" springs at the food of criminal hopes and desires. His conscience here acts through his imagination, and sets it all on fire; and, as the elements of evil gather and fashion themselves into the conscious purpose, he is seized and shaken with terrors which he knows to be imaginary, yet cannot allay.

It seems, then, quite clear to me that in the Poet's idea Macbeth already had the will, and that what he wanted further was but an earnest and assurance of success. The ordering of things so as to meet that want, and the tracing of the mental processes and the subtle workings of evil consequent thereon, — this it is that renders the drama such a paragon of ethical meaning organized into art. The Weird Sisters rightly strike the key-note and lead off the terrible chorus, because they embody and realize to us, and even to the hero himself, that secret preparation of evil within him out of which the whole action proceeds. In their fantastical and unearthly aspect, awakening mingled emotions of terror and mirth; in their mysterious reserve, and oracular brevity of speech, so fitted at once to sharpen curiosity and awe down scepticism; in the circumstances of their prophetic greeting, — a blasted heath, with the elements wrangling over it, as if Nature were at odds with herself, and in love with desolation; — in all this we may discern a peculiar aptness to generate, even in strong minds, a belief in what they utter.

The contrast in the behaviour of the two men at this point is deeply significant. Belief takes hold of them both

alike, for aught appears. Yet, while Macbeth is beside himself with excitement, and transported with guilty thoughts and imaginations, Banquo remains calm, unexcited, and perfectly self-poised. His intellectual forces are indeed stimulated by the preternatural address, but stimulated only to moralize the occasion, and to draw arguments in support of his better mind. He hears the speakers with simple wonder; shows no interest in them but that of an honest and rational curiosity; his mind is absorbed in the matter before him; and because he sees nothing of himself in them, and has no germs of wickedness for them to work upon, therefore "he neither begs nor fears their favours nor their hate." Macbeth, on the contrary, as we have seen, goes off in a trance of meditation, and loses what is before him in a stress of introversion: roused from this, he is eager and impatient to have them speak further, and his heart leaps forth to catch their words: and again, when his ear is saluted with a partial fulfilment of their promise, a still more violent fit of abstraction seizes him; his very senses being palsied by the horrid suggestion which at once charms and terrifies him, and which makes him shudder simply because it reveals an answering spirit and purpose within him. That which so entrances and appals him is but the image of his moral self, as he beholds it in the mirror of his newly-awakened consciousness. It is indeed a fearful transpiration of character!

Macbeth himself never thinks of making the Weird Sisters anywise responsible for what he does. The workings of his mind, throughout, manifestly infer that he feels just as free in his actions as if no supernatural soliciting had come near him. He therefore never offers to soothe his conscience or satisfy his reason on the score of his being under any fatal charm or fascination of evil. For, in truth, the promise of the throne is no more an instigation to murder for it, than a promise of wealth in like sort would be to steal. To a truly honest man, such a promise, in so far as he believed it, would preclude the motives to

theft. His thought would be, "Wealth is coming; I have but to work, and let it come." If, however, he were already a thief at heart, and kept from stealing only by fear of the consequences, he would be apt to construe the promise of wealth into a promise of impunity in theft. Which just marks the difference of Banquo and Macbeth. What with the one precludes the motive to crime, with the other itself becomes the motive to crime.

Banquo's moral reason, indeed, grows more vigilant and discerning for the temptations laid before him: his virtue, instead of being staggered by them, is rendered more circumspective and firm: he disarms or repels them by prayer; and the more they press upon him, the more he prays for help against them. For so we find that the having merely dreamed of the Weird Sisters moves him to exclaim, "Merciful Powers, restrain in me the cursèd thoughts that nature gives way to in repose!" And when Macbeth, on hearing of the dream, tries to draw him into his counsels, telling him "it shall make honour for him," he gives the prompt reply,

> "So I lose none,
> In seeking to augment it, but still keep
> My bosom franchised, and allegiance clear,
> I shall be counsell'd";

than which nothing could better approve his firmness of moral tone.

So much for the origin of the murderous purpose, and the agency of the Weird Sisters in bringing it to a head. Henceforth Macbeth's falterings and misgivings spring from the peculiar structure of his intellect as inflamed with the poison of meditated guilt. His understanding and imagination rush into irregular, convulsive action; conscience being indeed the main cause of that action, yet hiding itself in the agitations of mind which it stirs up. Thus a strange, fearful hallucination, all begotten of guilt, takes possession of him. Hence his long and fatal course of self-delusion.

He has done the greatest possible violence to his moral nature, and thereby "put rancours in the vessel of his peace"; but the agonies thence resulting he still misderives from external causes, and keeps mistranslating them into the warnings of prudence, the forecastings of reason, and the threatenings of danger. His strong and excitable imagination, set on fire of conscience, fascinates and spell-binds his other faculties, and so gives objectiveness to its internal workings. His moral forces even usurp his eyes and ears, turning them into "miraculous organs," so that he cannot choose but see and hear things that are not; as in case of "the air-drawn dagger which leads him to Duncan," and the cry that haunts him, "Sleep no more! Macbeth does murder sleep." Thus his conscience, instead of acting directly in the form of remorse, comes to act through imaginary terrors, which in turn react on his conscience, as fire is made hotter by the current of air which itself generates.

It is probably from oversight of this that some have set Macbeth down as a timid, cautious, remorseless villain, withheld from crime only by a shrinking, selfish apprehensiveness. He does indeed seem strangely dead to the guilt, and morbidly alive to the dangers, of his enterprise; free from remorses of conscience, and filled with imaginary fears: but whence his uncontrollable irritability of imagination? how comes it that his mind so swarms with horrible imaginings, but that his imagination itself is set on fire of Hell? Such "paintings of fear," it scarce need be said, are not the offspring of a mind in which the moral sense is weak or dead; rather they attest a peculiar strength and quickness in that sense. Call it insanity, if you will; but it is an insanity full of moral inspiration. And what a lesson does it read us of the secret possibilities of evil, ay, and of punishment too, wrapped up in the moral constitution of man!

Macbeth's conscience thus acting in disguise, the natural effect is, at first, to make him wavering and irresolute:

the harrowings of guilty fear have a certain prospective and preventive operation, causing him to recoil, he scarce knows why, from the work he has in hand. So that he would never be able to go through without other instigations. To launch him fairly in the career of crime, not only his ambition and thirst of power, but also his household affections and virtues must be arrayed against his scruples of reason and conscience. Not so, however, after the first great step has been taken. Then the self-same workings of conscience have the effect of goading him on from crime to crime. He still mistakes his inward pangs for outward perils. Guilt peoples his whereabout with fantastical terrors, which he labours to beat down, and thereby only multiplies. In his efforts to dissimulate he loses his self-control, and spills, or thinks he spills, the secret he is trying to hide; and in giving others cause to suspect him he plants his own heart full of suspicions against them. Thus his cowardice of conscience urges him on to fresh murders, and every murder adds to that cowardice; the very blood which he spills to quiet his fears sprouting up in "gorgons and chimeras dire," to awaken new fears and call for more victims.

I suppose it is a natural result of an imagination so redundant and excitable as his, that the agonies of remorse should project and embody themselves in imaginary terrors, and so spur him on to further crimes for security against those terrors. To give himself peace, Macbeth must still keep using his dagger; and yet every thrust he makes with it just stabs a new wound in his own soul. Such is the dreadful madness which guilt engenders in him! His moral forces indeed turn to a downright fury and venom of infatuation, insomuch that he boldly enters the lists against the very powers in which he has trusted.

All this comes out in his interview with Lady Macbeth on the eve of Banquo's murder:

> "We have but scotch'd the snake, not kill'd it:
> She'll close, and be herself; whilst our poor malice

> Remains in danger of her former tooth. But let
> The frame of things disjoint, both the worlds suffer,
> Ere we will eat our meal in fear, and sleep
> In the affliction of these terrible dreams
> That shake us nightly: better be with the dead,
> Whom we, to gain our place, have sent to peace,
> Than on the the torture of the mind to lie
> In restless ecstasy. Duncan is in his grave;
> After life's fitful fever, he sleeps well;
> Treason has done his worst; not steel, nor poison,
> Malice domestic, foreign levy, nothing
> Can touch him further."

Here we see that crime has filled his mind with scorpions, and still he thinks of no way to clear them out but by crime. And the thought of Duncan instantly charms him into a feverish brooding over the dangers which he seems to have invited against himself by murdering him. And it is well worth noting how, in this speech, as in several others, he goes on kindling more and more with his theme, till he fairly loses himself in a trance of moral and imaginative thought. The inward burnings of guilt act as a sort of inspiration to him. For the preternatural illumination of mind, which so often transports him, marks the insurgent stress of those moral forces which I have already noted in him.

Critics of a certain school have, in characteristic fashion, found fault with the huddling together and confusion of metaphors which Macbeth pours forth in his most excited moments. Here is an instance of what I mean:

> "Methought I heard a voice cry, *Sleep no more!*
> *Macbeth does murder sleep!* — the innocent sleep;
> Sleep, that knits up the ravell'd sleave of care,
> The death of each day's life, sore labour's bath,
> Balm of hurt minds, great Nature's second course,
> Chief nourisher in life's feast."

In this, and other like strains, the aforesaid critics take it rather ill, that Macbeth does not talk more according to

the rules of grammar and Blair. Shakespeare was content to let him talk according to his state of mind and the laws of his character. Nor, in this view, could any thing better serve than such a preternatural rush and redundancy of imagination, hurrying him on from thought to thought, and running and massing a multitude of half-formed images together. And such a cast of mind in the hero was perhaps necessary to the health of the drama; otherwise such a manifold tragedy had been in danger of turning out a mere accumulation of horrors. As it is, the impression is at once softened and deepened, after a style of art which Shakespeare alone could evoke and manage; the terrible treading, sometimes trembling, on the outermost edge, yet never passing over into the horrible. Thus a much higher degree of tragic effect is attained than would else stand within the terms of pleasurable emotion. Macbeth's imagination so overwrought and self-accelerating, — this it is that glorifies the drama with such an interfusion of tragic rupture and lyrical sweetness, and pours over the whole that baptism of terrible beauty which forms its distinctive excellence. If you would move men deeply, you must stimulate their active powers in proportion as you tax their receptive. And, when a man's imaginative forces are duly kindled, he will bear, and even enjoy, a stress of appeal, which would else defeat itself by stunning or revolting his sensibilities. Which is one reason, no doubt, why so many rather ambitious attempts at tragedy have proved in effect but "lamentable comedies."

Before passing on from the hero, I will advert briefly to one or two minute, but, I think, highly significant notes of character. Thus, at the first meeting of Macbeth and his wife:

> "*Macb.* My dearest love, Duncan comes here to-night.
> *Lady M.* And when goes hence?
> *Macb.* To-morrow, — as he purposes."

Again in the morning after the murder, when several Thanes make an early call upon him:

> "*Lennox.* Goes the King hence to-day?
> *Macb.* He does;—he did appoint so."

In the former case he meditates defeating the King's purpose by killing him; in the latter he has made it impossible for the King's appointment to be kept. And in both his mind is struck with a sudden impulse to be true to itself. He is wickedly ambitious, but not meanly false: honour, and the truthfulness that belongs to it, is something of a passion with him; and in these cases the instant conscience of falsehood pricks him into a mending of his speech. He finds it not easy at first to keep his tongue and heart from beating time together: it is hardly in his nature indeed to "look like the innocent flower, but be the serpent under it"; and therefore it is that his wife so pointedly warns him, "Your face, my thane, is as a book, where men may read strange matters." There is indeed much truth in her soliloquized description of him:

> "Thou wouldst be great;
> Art not without ambition, but without
> The illness should attend it: what thou wouldst highly,
> That wouldst thou holily; wouldst not play false,
> And yet wouldst wrongly win."

In the structure and working of her mind and moral frame, Lady Macbeth is the opposite of her husband, and therefore all the fitter to countervail his infirmity of purpose; that is, she differs from him in just the right way to supplement him. Of a firm, sharp, wiry, matter-of-fact intellect, doubly charged with energy of will, she has little in common with him save a red-hot ambition: hence, while the Weird disclosures act on her will just as on his, and she jumps forthwith into the same purpose, the effect on her mind is wholly different. Without his irritability of understanding and imagination, she is therefore subject to no such involuntary transports of thought. Accordingly

she never loses herself in any raptures of meditation; no illusions born of guilty fear get the mastery of her; at least, not when her will is in exercise: in her waking moments, her senses are always so thoroughly in her keeping, that she hears and sees things just as they are. As conscience draws no visions before her eyes, and shapes no voices in her hearing; so, while he is shaken and quite unmanned with fantastical terrors, she remains externally calm, collected, and cool. Her presence of mind indeed seems firmest when his trances of illusion run highest; so that, instead of being at all infected with his agitations, her forces then move in the aptest order to recover him from them. Which shows that her sympathy with his ambition, intense as it is, has no power to make her sympathize with his mental workings. It may almost be said indeed that what stimulates his imagination stifles hers.

Almost any other dramatist would have brought the Weird Sisters to act immediately on Lady Macbeth, and on her husband through her, as thinking her more open to superstitious allurements and charms. Shakespeare seems to have judged that aptness of mind for them to work upon would have disqualified her for working upon her husband in aid of them. Enough of such influence has already been brought to bear: what is needed further, is quite another sort of influence, such as could only come from a mind not much accessible to the Weird Sisters.

There was strong dramatic reason, therefore, why Lady Macbeth should have such a mind and temper as to be moved and impressed, when awake, by nothing but facts. She ought to be, as indeed she is, so constituted, that the evil which has struck its roots so deep within never comes back to her in the elements and aspects of Nature, either to mature the guilty purpose or to obstruct the guilty act. It is remarkable that she does not once recur to the Weird Sisters, nor make any use of their salutations: they seem to have no weight with her, but for the impression they have wrought on her husband. That this impression may

grow to the desired effect, she refrains from meddling with it, and seeks only to fortify it with impressions of another sort. And what could better approve her shrewdness and tact than that, instead of overstraining this one motive, and so weakening it, she thus lets it alone, and labours to strengthen it by mixing others with it. For, in truth, the Weird Sisters represent, in most appalling sort, the wickedness of the purpose they suggest: so that Macbeth's fears as well as his hopes are stimulated, and his fears even more than his hopes, by the recollection of their greetings: the instant he reverts to them, his imagination springs into action, — an organ of which ambition works the bellows indeed, but conscience still governs the stops and keys. The very thought of them indeed seems to put him at once under a fascination of terror. All this does not escape his wife; who therefore judges it best rather to draw his thoughts off from that matter, and fix them on other inducements. He had thought of the murder, when as yet he could see no opportunities for doing it. When those opportunities come, *they* are the arguments that tell with her; and she therefore makes it her business to urge them upon him, invoking his former manhood withal, to redintegrate and shame him out of his present weakness:

> "Nor time nor place
> Did then adhere, and yet you would make both:
> They've made themselves, and that their fitness now
> Does unmake you."

Coleridge justly remarks upon her adroit boldness in first pressing those very considerations which most stagger her husband's purpose. That the King has cast himself unreservedly on their loyalty and hospitality, this she puts forth as the strongest argument for murdering him! An awful stroke of character indeed, and therefore awful, because natural. By thus anticipating his greatest drawbacks, and urging them as the chief incentives, she forecloses all debate. Which is just what she wants; for she knows full well that the thing will not stand the tests of

reason a moment: it must be done first, and discussed afterwards. And throughout this wrestling-match she surveys the whole ground, and darts upon the strongest points with the quickness and sureness of instinct; the sharpness of the exigency being to her a sort of practical inspiration. The finishing stroke in this part of the work is when, her husband's resolution being all in a totter, she boldly cuts the sinews of retreat, casting the thing into a personal controversy, and making it a theme of domestic war:

> "*Lady M.* Art thou afeard
> To be the same in thine own act and valour
> As thou art in desire? Wouldst thou lack that
> Which thou esteem'st the ornament of life,
> And live a coward in thine own esteem,
> Letting *I dare not* wait upon *I would*,
> Like the poor cat i' the adage?
> *Macb.* Pr'ythee, peace!
> I dare do all that may become a man;
> Who dares do more is none.
> *Lady M.* What beast was't, then,
> That made you break this enterprise to me?
> When you durst do it, then you were a man."

After this, it is hardly possible they should live together, unless he do the deed. The virtues and affections of the husband are now drawn up against the conscience of the man. For, to be scorned and baited as a coward by the woman he loves, and by whom he is loved, is the last thing a soldier can bear: death is nothing to it! Macbeth, accordingly, goes about the deed, and goes through it, with an assumed ferocity caught from his wife.

Nor is that ferocity native to her own breast: surely, on her part too, it is assumed; for, though in her intense overheat of expectant passion it is temporarily fused into her character, it is disengaged and thrown off as soon as that heat passes away; as men, in the ardour of successful effort, sometimes pass for a while into a character which they undertake to play. Lady Macbeth begins with acting

a part which is really foreign to her; but which, notwithstanding, such is her energy of will, she braves out to issues so overwhelming, that her husband and many others believe it to be her own. I here refer especially to the speech beginning, "I have given suck, and know how tender 'tis to love the babe that milks me." It is said that Mrs. Siddons used to utter the closing words of that speech in a scream, as though scared from her propriety by the audacity of her own tongue. And I can well conceive how a spasmodic action of fear might lend to such a woman as Lady Macbeth an appearance of superhuman or inhuman boldness. At all events, it seems clear enough that in this case her fierce vehemence of purpose rasps her woman's feelings to the quick; and the pang thence resulting might well utter itself in a scream.

Lady Macbeth is indeed a great bad woman whom we fear and pity; but neither so great nor so bad, I am apt to think, as is commonly supposed. She has closely studied her husband, and penetrated far into the heart of his mystery: yet she knows him rather as he is to her than as he is in himself; hence in describing his character she interprets her own. She has indeed the ambition to wish herself unsexed, but not the power to unsex herself except in words. For, though she invokes the "murdering ministers" to "come to her woman's breasts, and take her milk for gall," still she cannot make them come; and her milk, in spite of her invocation, continues to be milk. Verplanck describes her as "a woman of high intellect, bold spirit, and lofty desires, who is mastered by a fiery thirst of power, and that for her husband as well as herself."

Two characters, however, may easily be made out for Lady Macbeth, according as we lay the chief stress on what she says or what she does. For, surely, no one can fail to remark that the anticipation raised by her earlier speeches is by no means sustained in her subsequent acts. When she looks upon the face of the sleeping King, and

sees the murderous thought passing, as it were, into a *fact* before her, a gush of womanly feeling or of native tenderness suddenly stays her hand: "Had he not resembled my father as he slept, I had done't." That such a real or fancied resemblance should thus rise up and unsinew her purpose in the moment of action, is a rare touch of nature indeed; and shows that conscience works even more effectually through the feelings in her case than through the imagination in that of her husband. And the difference of imagination and feeling in this point is, that the one acts most at a distance, the other on the spot. This sharp contradiction between her tongue and her hand has often reminded me of a line which Schiller puts into the mouth of Wallenstein: "Bold were my words, because my deeds were *not*." And it seems to me that the towering audacity of her earlier speeches arises, at least in part, from an overstrained endeavour to school herself into a firmness and fierceness of which she feels the want.

Her whole after-course, I think, favours this view. For instance, when she hears from Macbeth how he has murdered the two grooms also, she sinks down at the tale. For I can by no means regard that as a counterfeit swoon. The thing takes her by surprise, and her iron-ribbed self-control for once gives way. The announcement of the King's murder had no such effect upon her, for she was prepared for that. And that was when she would have counterfeited fainting, if at all. So bold of tongue, she could indeed say, "the sleeping and the dead are but as pictures; 'tis the eye of childhood, that fears a painted devil"; but the sequel proves her to have been better than she was aware. In truth, she has undertaken too much: in her efforts to screw her own and her husband's courage to the sticking-place, there was exerted a force of will which answered the end indeed, but at the same time flawed the core of her being. She has quite as much of conscience as her husband; but no such sensitive redundancy of imagination, as that her conscience should be in her senses, causing

the howlings of the storm to syllable the notes of remorse. Here, again, we see her characteristic matter-of-factness. It is deeds, not thoughts, that kindle the furies in her soul. And because the workings of guilt do not pass out of her, as it were, and take on the form of spectral illusions, therefore they just eat back and consume all the more fatally within: had she an organ to project and shape them outwardly in fantastical terrors, their action would be tempered more equally to her powers of endurance. With her prodigious force of will, she may indeed keep them hidden from others, but she can neither repress nor assuage them. And for the same cause she is free alike from the terrible apprehensions which make her husband flinch from the first crime, and from the maddening and merciless suspicions that sting him on to other crimes.

Accordingly she gives no waking sign of the dreadful work that is doing within; the unmitigable corrodings of her rooted sorrow, even when busiest in destruction, do not once betray her, except when her self-rule is dissolved in sleep. But the truth comes out with an awful mingling of pathos and terror, in the scene where her conscience, sleepless amidst the sleep of nature, nay, most restless even then when all others' cares are at rest, drives her forth, open-eyed yet sightless, to sigh and groan over spots on her hands that are visible to none but herself, nor even to herself save when she is blind to every thing else: a living automaton worked by the agonies of remorse! How perfectly her senses are then dominated by the conscience, is shown with supreme effect in "Here's the smell of blood still"; which has been aptly noted as the only instance in modern times where the sense of smell has been successfully employed in high tragic expression. An awful mystery, too, hangs over her death. We know not, the Poet himself seems not to know, whether the gnawings of the undying worm drive her to suicidal violence, or themselves cut asunder the cords of her life: all we know is, that the death of her body springs somehow from the inextinguishable life and the immedicable wound

of her soul. What a history of her woman's heart is written in her thus sinking, sinking away where imagination shrinks from following her, under the violence of an invisible yet unmistakable disease, which still sharpens its inflictions and at the same time quickens her sensibilities!

Lady Macbeth dies before her husband. This is one of the most judicious points of the drama. Her death touches Macbeth in the only spot where he seems to retain the feelings of a man, and draws from him some deeply-solemn, soothing, elegiac tones; so that one rises from the contemplation of his history "a sadder and a wiser man":

> "*Macb.* Wherefore was that cry?
> *Seyton.* The Queen, my lord, is dead.
> *Macb.* She would have died hereafter;
> There would have been a time for such a word.—
> To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow,
> Creeps in this petty pace from day to day,
> To the last syllable of recorded time;
> And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
> The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!
> Life's but a walking shadow; a poor player,
> That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,
> And then is heard no more: it is a tale
> Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
> Signifying nothing."

It has been justly observed that "Macbeth, left alone, resumes much of that connection with humanity which he had so long abandoned: his thoughtfulness becomes pathetic; and, when at last he dies the death of a soldier, the stern satisfaction, with which we contemplate the act of justice that destroys him, is unalloyed by feelings of personal wrath or hatred. His fall is a sacrifice, and not a butchery." *

This guilty couple are patterns of conjugal virtue. A tender, delicate, respectful affection sweetens and dignifies their intercourse; the effect of which is rather heightened than otherwise by their ambition, because they seem to thirst for each other's honour as much as for their own

* *The Edinburgh Review*, July, 1840.

And this sentiment of mutual respect even grows by their crimes, since their inborn greatness is developed through them. For they both sin heroically, and they both suffer heroically too. And when they find that the crown, which they have waded through so much blood to grasp, does but scald their brows and stuff their pillow with thorns, this begets a still deeper and finer play of sympathy between them. Thenceforth (and how touching its effect!) a soft subdued undertone of inward sympathetic woe and anguish mingles audibly in the wild rushing of the moral tempest which hangs round their footsteps. Need I add how free they are from any thing little or mean, any thing vulgar or gross? The very intensity of their wicked passion seems to have assoiled their minds of all such earthy and ignoble incumbrances. And so manifest, withal, is their innate fitness to reign, that their ambition almost passes as the instinct of faculty for its proper sphere.

Dr. Johnson observes, with singular infelicity, that this play "has no nice discriminations of character." How far this dictum is from being just, I trust has been made clear enough already. In this respect, the hero and heroine are equalled only by the Poet's other masterpieces, — by Shylock, Hamlet, Lear, and Iago; while the Weird Sisters, so seemingly akin (though whether as mothers or sisters or daughters, we cannot tell) to the thunder-storms that come and go with them, occupy the summit of his preternatural creations. Nevertheless it must be owned that the grandeur of the dramatic combination somewhat overshadows the individual characters; insomuch that something of special effort is required to keep the delicate limning of the agents from being lost sight of in the magnitude, the manifold unity, and thought-like rapidity of the action.

The style of this mighty drama is pitched in the same high tragic key as the action. Throughout, we have an explosion, as of purpose into act, so also of thought into speech, both literally kindling with their own swiftness

No sooner thought than said, no sooner said than done, is the law of the piece. Therewithal thoughts and images come crowding and jostling each other in such quick succession as to prevent a full utterance; a second leaping upon the tongue before the first is fairly off. I should say the Poet here specially endeavoured how much of meaning could be conveyed in how little of expression; with the least touching of the ear to send vibrations through all the chambers of the mind. Hence the large, manifold sug gestiveness which lurks in the words: they seem instinct with something which the speakers cannot stay to unfold. And between these invitations to linger and the continual drawings onward the reader's mind is kindled to an almost preternatural activity. All which might at length grow wearisome, but that the play is, moreover, throughout, a conflict of antagonist elements and opposite extremes, which are so managed as to brace up the interest on every side: so that the effect of the whole is to refresh, not exhaust the powers; the mind being sustained in its long and lofty flight by the wings that grow forth as of their own accord from its superadded life. The lyrical element, instead of being interspersed here and there in the form of musical lulls and pauses, is thoroughly interfused with the dramatic; while the ethical sense underlies them both, and is forced up through them by their own pressure. The whole drama indeed may be described as a tempest set to music.

My mind has long been made up, that in the banquet-scene the actual reappearance of the murdered Banquo ought by all means to be discontinued on the stage. It can hardly fail to excite feelings just the reverse of suitable to the occasion: in a word, the thing is simply ludicrous, and cannot be made to seem otherwise in our time. It is indeed certain, from Forman's *Notes*, that such reappearance was used in the Poet's time; but there were good reasons for it then which do not now exist. In the right

conception of the matter, the ghost is manifestly a thing existing only in the diseased imagination of Macbeth; what we call a *subjective* ghost, a Banquo of the mind; and having no more objective being than the air-drawn dagger of a previous scene; the difference being that Macbeth is there so well in his senses as to be aware of the unreality, while he is here quite out of his senses, and completely hallucinated. All this is evident in that the apparition is seen by none of the other persons present. In Shakespeare's time, the generality of people could not possibly take the conception of a subjective ghost; but it is not so now. To be sure, it was part of the old superstition in this behalf, that a ghost could make itself visible, if it chose, only to such as it had some special concern with; but this is just what we mean by a subjective ghost. The same arguments and the same conclusion hold also respecting the Ghost in the closet-scene of *Hamlet*, where the hero has the interview with his mother.

It has often struck me as a highly-significant fact, that the sleep-walking scene, which is more intensely tragic than any other scene in Shakespeare, is all, except the closing speech, written in prose. Why is this? The question is at least not a little curious. The diction is of the very plainest and simplest texture; yet what an impression of sublimity it carries! In fact, I suspect the matter is too sublime, too austerely grand, to admit of any thing so artificial as the measured language of verse, even though the verse were Shakespeare's; and that the Poet, as from an instinct of genius, saw or felt that any attempt to heighten the effect by any such arts or charms of delivery would unbrace and impair it. And I think that the very diction of the closing speech, poetical as it is, must be felt by every competent reader as a letting-down to a lower intellectual plane. Is prose, then, after all, a higher form of speech than verse?

Divers critics have spoken strongly against the Porter-scene: Coleridge denounces it as unquestionably none of

Shakespeare's work. Which makes me almost afraid to trust my own judgment concerning it; yet I always feel it to be in the true spirit of the Poet's method. This strain of droll broad humour, oozing out amid such a congregation of terrors, to my mind deepens their effect, the strange but momentary diversion causing them to return with the greater force. Of the murder-scene, the banquet-scene, the sleep-walking-scene, with their dagger of the mind, and Banquo of the mind, and blood-spots of the mind, it were vain to speak. Yet over these sublimely-terrific passages there everywhere hovers a magic light of poetry, at once disclosing the horrors of the scene and annealing them into matter of delight. — Hallam sets the work down as being, in the language of Drake, "the greatest effort of our author's genius, the most sublime and impressive drama which the world has ever beheld"; a judgment from which most readers will perhaps be less inclined to dissent, the older they grow.

KING LEAR.

The Tragedy of King Lear was acted at Court on the 26th of December, 1606; as appears by an entry at the Stationers' dated November 26, 1607: "A book called Mr. William Shakespeare's History of King Lear, as it was played before the King's Majesty at Whitehall, upon St. Stephen's night at Christmas last, by his Majesty's Servants playing usually at the Globe on the Bankside." This is the only contemporary notice of *King Lear* that has reached us. Most likely the play had become favourably known on the public stage before it was called for at the Court. On the other hand, it contains divers names and allusions evidently borrowed from Harsnet's *Declaration of Popish Impostures*, which appeared in 1603. This is all the positive information we have as to the date of the writing.

There are, however, several passages in the play itself, referring, apparently, to contemporary events, and thus indicating still more nearly the time of the composition. Of these it seems hardly worth the while to note more than one. In Act i., scene 2, Gloster says, "These late eclipses in the Sun and Moon portend no good to us: though the wisdom of nature can reason it thus and thus, yet nature finds itself scourged by the sequent effects." A great eclipse of the Sun took place in October, 1605, and had been looked forward to with dread as portending evil; the more so, because an eclipse of the Moon occurred within the space of a month previous. And John Harvey had, in 1588, published a book wherein, with "the wisdom of nature," he had reasoned against the common belief, that such natural events were ominous of disaster, or had some moral significance in them. Therewithal, in November, 1605, the dreadful secret of the Gunpowder Plot came to light; so that one at all superstitiously inclined might well say that "nature finds itself scourged by the sequent effects," and that "machinations, hollowness, treachery, and all ruinous disorders follow us disquietly to our graves." Taking all these particulars together, we have ample ground for inferring the play to have been written near the close of 1605, or somewhat later.

The tragedy was printed at least twice, some editors say three times, in the year 1608, the form being in each case a small quarto. It also reappeared, along with the other plays, in the folio of 1623. Considerable portions of the play, as given in the quartos, are omitted in the folio; in particular one whole scene, the third in Act iv., which, though perhaps of no great account on the stage, is, in the reading, one of the sweetest and loveliest in all Shakespeare. This naturally infers the folio to have been printed from a playhouse copy in which the play had been cut down, to abridge the time of performance. — I must add that the play has several passages which were most certainly not written by Shakespeare. Two of these

have considerable length, one including seventeen lines, the other fourteen; besides several shorter ones. By whom these were written, and why they were inserted, it were probably vain to speculate.

The story of King Lear and his three daughters is one of those old legends with which Mediæval Romance peopled the "dark backward and abysm of time," where fact and fancy appear all of one colour and texture. Milton, discoursing of ante-historical Britain, compares the gradual emerging of authentic history from the shadows of fable and legend, to the course of one who, "having set out on his way by night, and travelled through a region of smooth and idle dreams, arrives on the confines where daylight and truth meet him with a clear dawn, representing to his view, though at a far distance, true colours and shapes." In Shakespeare's time, the legendary tale which furnished the main plot of this drama was largely interwoven with the popular literature of Europe. It is met with in various forms and under various names. The oldest extant version of it, in connection with British history, is in Geoffrey of Monmouth, a Welsh monk of the twelfth century, who translated it from the ancient British tongue into Latin. From thence it was abridged by the Poet's favourite chronicler, Holinshed. I have not room for a sketch of the tale in any of its forms, and must dismiss it by saying that it gives the main incidents of the leading plot very much as we have them in the play. The subordinate plot of Gloster and his sons was probably taken from an episodical chapter in Sir Philip Sidney's *Arcadia*. Here the borrowing was less literal, being rather in the way of ideas than of incidents. This, also, I must leave unsketched.

A good deal of irrelevant criticism has been spent upon the circumstance that in the details and costume of this play the Poet did not hold himself to the date of the forecited legend. That date was some eight hundred years before Christ; yet the play abounds in the manners, senti-

ments, and allusions of modern England. Malone is scandalized that Edgar in the play should speak of Nero, while the old chroniclers place Lear's reign upwards of eight hundred years before the birth of that gentleman. The painstaking Mr. Douce, also, is in dire distress at the Poet's blunder in substituting the manners of England under the Tudors for those of the ancient Britons.

Now to make these points, or such as these, any ground of impeachment, is to mistake totally the nature and design of the work. For the drama is not, nor was meant to be, in any sense of the term a history: it is a tragedy, and nothing else; and as such is as free of chronological circumscriptions as human nature itself. The historical or legendary matter, be it more or less, neither shapes nor guides the structure of the piece, but is used in entire subservience to the general ends of tragic representation. The play, therefore, does not fall within the lines of any jurisdiction for settling dates; it is amenable to no laws but those of Art, any more than if it were entirely of the Poet's own creation: its true whereabout is in the reader's mind; and the only proper question is, whether it keeps to the laws of this whereabout; in which reference it will probably stand the severest inquisitions that criticism has strength to prosecute.

This I take to be an ample vindication of the play not only from the aforesaid criticisms, but from any others of like sort that may be urged. And it seems to me to put the whole matter upon just the right ground; leaving to the Drama all the freedom and variety that belong to the Gothic Architecture, where the only absolute law is, that the parts shall all stand in mutual intelligence: and the more the structure is diversified in form, aspect, purpose, and expression, the grander and more elevating is the harmony resulting from the combination. It is clearly in the scope and spirit of this great principle of Gothic Art that *King Lear* was conceived and worked out. Herein, to be sure, it is like other of the Poet's dramas, only, it seems to

me, more so than any of the rest. There is almost no end to the riches here drawn together: on attempting to reckon over the parts and particulars severally, one is amazed to find what varied wealth of character, passion, pathos, poetry, and high philosophy is accumulated in the work. Yet there is a place for every thing, and every thing is in its place: we find nothing but what makes good its right to be where and as it is; so that the accumulation is not more vast and varied in form and matter than it is united and harmonious in itself. I have spoken of a main and a subordinate plot in the drama; and I may add that either of these might suffice for a great tragedy by itself: yet the two plots are so woven together as to be hardly distinguishable, and not at all separable; we can scarce perceive when one goes out and the other comes in.

Accordingly, of all Shakespeare's dramas, this, on the whole, is the one which, considering both the qualities of the work and the difficulties of the subject, best illustrates the measure of his genius; — his masterpiece in that style or order of composition which he, I will not say created, but certainly carried so much higher than any one else as to make it peculiarly his own. The work is indeed, to my mind, the highest specimen we have of what is aptly called the Gothic Drama.

The style and versification of *King Lear* do not differ from those of other plays written at or about the same period, save that here they seem attracted, as by imperceptible currents of sympathy, into a freedom and variety of movement answerable to the structure of the piece. There seems, in this case, no possible tone of mind or feeling, but that the Poet has a congenial form of imagery to body it forth, and a congenial pitch of rhythm and harmony to give it voice. Certainly, in none of his plays do we more feel the presence and power of that wonderful diction, not to say language, which he gradually wrought out and built up as the fitting and necessary organ of his thought. English literature has nothing else like it; and whatsoever else

it has seems tame, stiff, and mechanical in the comparison.

Nor is there any of the Poet's dramas wherein we have in larger measure the sentiments of the individual, as these are kindled by special occasions, forthwith expanding into general truth, and so lifting the whole into the clear daylight of a comprehensive philosophy. It is by this process that the Poet so plays upon the passions as, through them, to instruct the reason: I mean, that he interests us in the persons, and then so works that personal interest as to project our thoughts onward and upward into the highest regions of contemplation.

Touching the improbability, sometimes censured, of certain incidents in this tragedy, it seems needful that somewhat be said. Improbable enough, I grant, some of the incidents are. But these nowise touch the substantial truth of the drama: the Poet merely uses them as occasions for what he has to unfold of the inner life of Nature and Man. Besides, he did not invent them. They stood dressed in many attractive shapes before him, inviting his hand. And his use of them is amply justified in that they were matters of common and familiar tradition, and as such already domesticated in the popular mind and faith. And it is specially characteristic of Shakespeare that, however improbable may be his frame-work of incident, he nevertheless makes it alive with the soul of Nature's truth; whereas other writers will frame you up a plot of commonplace incidents, and then proceed to set at nought all the weightier matters of Nature; yet their workmanship readily passes current with the criticism that has so often faulted him in this regard.

As to the alleged improbabilities of *character*, this is another and a much graver question. The play, it must be confessed, sets forth an extreme diversity of moral complexion, but especially a boldness and lustihood in crime, such as cannot but seem unnatural if tried by the rule, or even by the exceptions, of what we are used to see of

Nature. Measuring, indeed, the capabilities of man by the standard of our own observations, we shall find all the higher representations of Art, and even many well-attested things of history, too much for belief. But this is not the way to deal with such things: our business is to be taught by them as they are, and not to crush them down to the measure of what we already know.

And so we should bear in mind, that the scene of this play is laid in a period of time when the innate peculiarities of men were much less subjected than in our day to the stamp of a common impression. For the influences under which we live cannot but generate more uniformity of character; which makes us apt to regard as monstrous that rankness of growth, those great crimes and great virtues which are recorded of earlier times, and which furnish the material of deep tragedy. For the process of civilization, if it does not kill out the aptitudes of rampant crime, at least involves a constant discipline of prudence that keeps them in a more decorous reserve. But, suppose the pressure of such motives and restraints to be wanting, and then it will not appear so very incredible that there should be just such spontaneous outcomings of wicked impulse, just such redundant transpirations of original sin, as are here displayed. Accordingly, while we are amidst the Poet's scenes, and subject to his power, he seems to enlarge our knowledge of Nature; but when we fall back and go to comparing his shows with our experiences, he seems rather to have beguiled us with illusions than edified us with truth. But this, I suspect, is more our fault than his. And that criticism is best which is rather born of what he makes us than of what we are without him. In some respects, indeed, it may be better to speak as independent of him, but yet, on the whole, I prefer to speak as he moves me.

In speaking of the characters of this play I hardly know where to begin. Much has been written upon them; and the best critics have been so kindled and raised by the

theme as to surpass themselves. The persons are variously divisible into groups, according as we regard their domestic or their moral affinities. I prefer to consider them as grouped upon the latter. And as the main action of the drama is shaped by the energy of evil, I will begin with those in whom that energy prevails.

There is no accounting for the conduct of Goneril and Regan, but by supposing them possessed with a strong original impulse of malignity. The main points of their action were taken from the old story. Character, in the proper sense of the term, they have none in the legend; and the Poet invested them with characters suitable to the part they were believed to have acted.

Whatever of soul these beings possess is all in the head: they have no heart to guide or inspire their understanding, and but enough of understanding to seize occasions and frame excuses for their heartlessness. Without affection, they are also without shame; there being barely so much of human blood in their veins as may suffice for quickening the brain without sending a blush to the cheek. With a sort of hell-inspired tact, they feel their way to a fitting occasion, but drop the mask as soon as their ends are reached; caring little or nothing for appearances after their falsehood has done its work. There is a smooth, glib rhetoric in their professions of love, unwarmed with the least grace of real feeling, and a certain wiry virulence and intrepidity of mind in their after-speaking, that is fairly terrific. No touch of nature finds a response in their bosoms; no atmosphere of comfort can abide their presence: we feel that they have somewhat within that turns the milk of humanity to venom, which all the wounds they can inflict are but opportunities for casting.

The subordinate plot of the drama serves the purpose of relieving the improbability of their behaviour. Some have indeed censured this plot as an embarrassment to the main one; forgetting, perhaps, that to raise and sustain the feelings at any great height there needs some breadth of basis.

A degree of evil which, if seen altogether alone, would strike us as superhuman, makes a very different impression when it has the support of proper sympathies and associations. This effect is in a good measure secured by Edmund's independent concurrence with Goneril and Regan in wickedness. It looks as if some malignant planet had set the elements of evil a-stir in several hearts at the same time; so that "unnaturalness between the child and the parent" were become, sure enough, the order of the day.

Besides, the agreement of the sister-fiends in filial ingratitude might seem, of itself, to argue some sisterly attachment between them. So that, to bring out their characters truly, it had to be shown that the same principle which unites them against their father will, on the turning of occasion, divide them against each other. Hence the necessity of setting them forth in relations of such a kind as may breed strife between them. In Edmund, accordingly, they find a character wicked enough, and energetic enough in his wickedness, to interest their feelings; and because they are both alike taken with him, therefore they will cut their way to him through each other's life. And it is considerable that their passion for him proceeds mainly upon his treachery to his father, as though from such similarity of action they inferred a congeniality of mind. For even to have hated each other from love of any one but a villain, and because of his villainy, had seemed a degree of virtue in beings such as they are.

There is so much sameness of temper and behaviour in these two she-tigers, that we find it somewhat difficult to distinguish them as individuals; their characteristic traits being, as it were, fused and run together in the heat of a common malice. Both are actuated by an extreme ferocity, which however, up to the time of receiving their portions, we must suppose to have been held in check by a most artful and vigilant selfishness. And the malice of Goneril, the eldest, appears still to be under some restraint, from feeling that her husband is not in sympathy with her. For Albany,

though rather timid and tardy in showing it, remains true to the old King; his tardiness probably springing, at least in part, from a reluctance to make a square issue with his wife, who, owing to her superiority of rank and position, had somewhat the advantage of him in their marriage. Regan, on the other hand, has in Cornwall a husband whose heart beats in perfect unison with her own against her father; and the confidence of his sympathy appears to discharge her malice entirely from the restraints of caution, and to give it a peculiar quickness and alertness of action. Near the close of the King's last interview with these dreadful creatures, we have the following:

> "*Gon.* Why might not you, my lord, receive attendance
> From those that she calls servants or from mine?
> *Reg.* Why not, my lord? If then they chanc'd to slack you,
> We could control them. If you will come to me, —
> For now I spy a danger, — I intreat you
> To bring but five-and-twenty: to no more
> Will I give place or notice.
> *Lear.* I gave you all, —
> *Reg.* And in good time you gave it.
> *Lear.* — Made you my guardians, my depositaries;
> But kept a reservation to be follow'd
> With such a number."

I quote this passage mainly for the purpose of noting the concentrated wolfishness of heart in those few words, "And in good time you gave it," snapped out in reply to the pathetic appeal, "I gave you all." Human speech cannot be more intensely charged with fury. And this cold, sharp venom of retort is what chiefly discriminates Regan from Goneril: otherwise they seem too much like repetitions of each other to come fairly within the circle of Nature, who never repeats herself. Yet their very agreement in temper and spirit renders them the fitter for the work they do. For the sameness of treatment thence proceeding is all the more galling and unbearable forasmuch as it appears the result of a set purpose, a conspiracy coolly formed and unrelentingly pursued. That they should lay on their father the blame of

their own ingratitude, and stick their poisoned tongues into him under pretence of doing him good, is a further refinement of malice not more natural to them than tormenting to him. It is indeed difficult to conceive how creatures could be framed more apt to drive mad any one who had set his heart on receiving any comfort or kindness from them.

Of the conduct ascribed to these ladies after the death of Cornwall, what shall I say? It is true, the Poet prepares us somewhat for their final transports of internecine ferocity, by the moralizing he puts into the mouth of Albany:

> "That nature which contemns its origin
> Cannot be border'd certain in itself";

meaning, apparently, that where the demon of filial ingratitude reigns, there the heart is ripening for the most unnatural crimes, and that there is no telling what it will do, or where it will stop. Nevertheless I hardly know how to approve an exhibition of depravity so extreme. The action of Goneril and Regan, taken all together, seems the most improbable thing in the drama. I cannot quite shake off the feeling, that before the heart could become so thoroughly petrified the brain must cease to operate. I find it not easy, indeed, to think of them otherwise than as instruments of the plot; not so much ungrateful persons as personifications of ingratitude. Yet I have to acknowledge that their blood is of much the same colour as ours.

For the union of wit and wickedness, Edmund stands next to Richard and Iago. His strong and nimble intellect, his manifest courage, his energy of character, and his noble person, prepare us on our first acquaintance to expect from him not only great undertakings, but great success in them. But, while his personal advantages naturally generate pride, his disgraces of fortune are such as, from pride, to generate guilt. The circumstances of our first meeting with him, the matter and manner of Gloster's talk about him and to him, go far to explain his conduct; while the subsequent outleakings of his mind in soliloquy let us into his secret

springs of action. With a mixture of guilt, shame, and waggery, his father, before his face, and in the presence of one whose respect he craves, makes him and his birth a theme of gross and wanton discourse; at the same time drawing comparisons between him and "another son some year elder than this," such as could hardly fail at once to wound his pride, to stimulate his ambition, and to awaken his enmity. Thus the kindly influences of human relationship and household ties are turned to their contraries. He feels himself the victim of a disgrace for which he is not to blame; which he cannot hope to outgrow; which no degree of personal worth can efface; and from which he sees no escape but in the pomp and circumstance of worldly power. Nor is this all:

Whatever aptitudes he may have to filial virtue are thwarted by his father's open impiety towards his mother: the awe with which we naturally contemplate the mystery of our coming hither is prevented by his father's coarse levity respecting his birth and her who bore him. Thus the very beginnings of religion are stifled in him by the impossibility of honouring his father and mother: as they have no religion towards each other, so he has none towards them. He rather despises them for being his parents; and the consciousness of being himself a living monument of their shame tends to pervert the felicities of his nature.

Then too, by his residence and education abroad, he is cut off from the fatherly counsels and kindnesses which might else compensate, in part, the disgraces entailed upon him. His shame of birth, however, nowise represses his pride of blood: on the contrary, it furnishes the conditions wherein such pride, though the natural auxiliary of many virtues, is most apt to fester into crime. For, while his shame begets scorn of family ties, his pride passes into greediness of family possessions: the passion for hereditary honours is unrestrained by domestic attachments: no love of Edgar's person comes in to foreclose a lust for his dis-

tinctions; and he is led to envy as a rival the brother whom he would else respect as a superior.

Always thinking, too, of his dishonour, he is ever on the watch for signs that others are thinking of it; and the jealousy thence engendered construes every show of respect into an effort of courtesy; a thing that inflames his ambition while chafing his pride. The corroding suspicion, that others are perhaps secretly scorning his noble descent while outwardly acknowledging it, leads him to find or fancy in them a disposition to indemnify themselves for his personal superiority out of his social debasement. The stings of reproach, being personally unmerited, are resented as wrongs; and with the plea of injustice he can easily reconcile his mind to the most wicked schemes. Aware of Edgar's virtues, still he has no relentings; but shrugs his shoulders, and laughs off all compunctions with an "I must"; as if justice to himself were a sufficient excuse for his criminal purposes.

With "the plague of custom" and "the curiosity of nations" Edmund has no compact: he did not consent to them, and therefore holds himself unbound by them. He came into the world in spite of them; perhaps he owes his gifts to a breach of them: may he not, then, seek to thrive by circumventing them? Since his dimensions are so well compact, his mind so generous, and his shape so true, he prefers Nature as she has made him to Nature as she has placed him; and freely employs the wit she has given, to compass the wealth she has withheld. Thus our free-love philosopher appeals from convention to Nature; and, as usually happens in such cases, takes only so much of Nature as will serve his turn. For convention itself is a part of Nature; it being no less natural that men should grow up together in families and communities than that they should grow up severally as individuals. To be somewhat more particular, the sacredness and inviolability of marriage and of the family state is a natural as well as a Divine provision for the continuance and health of the

human kind; and it is an altogether spurious and diabolical gospel which would subordinate to the alleged rights of the individual that great law of our social constitution. But with Edmund the same spirit that prompts the appeal orders the tribunal. Nor does Nature, in such cases, contradict, or debate, or try conclusions with men; but just nods assent to their propositions, and lets them have their own way, as knowing that "the very devils cannot plague them better."

Nevertheless there is not in Edmund, as in Iago, any spontaneous or purposeless wickedness. Adventures in crime are not at all his pastime: they are his means, not his end; his instruments, not his element. Nay, he does not so much make war on Duty, as bow and shift her off out of the way, that his wit may have free course. He deceives others indeed without scruple, but then he does not consider them bound to trust him, and tries to avail himself of their credulity or criminality without becoming responsible for it. True, he is a pretty bold experimenter, rather radical in his schemes, but this is because he has nothing to lose if he fails, and much to gain if he succeeds. Nor does he attempt to disguise from himself, or gloss over, or anywise palliate, his designs; but boldly confronts and stares them in the face, as though assured of sufficient external grounds to justify or excuse them.

Edmund's strength and acuteness of intellect, unsubjected as they are to the moral and religious sentiments, exempt him from the superstitions that prevail about him. He has an eye to discern the error of such things, but no sense for the deeper truth they involve. For such superstitions are the natural suggestions of the religious instincts unenlightened by Revelation. So that he who would not be superstitious without Revelation would probably be irreligious with it; and that there is more of truth in superstition than in irreligion, is implied in the fact of religious instincts. In other words, Edmund is a free-thinker; not in the right philosophical sense of the term, but in the

old historic sense; that is, one in whom the intellect owns no allegiance to the conscience. No awe of Duty, no religious fear to do or think wrong, is allowed to repress or abridge his freedom of thought. Thus it is merely the atheism of the heart that makes him so discerning of error in what he does not like; in which case the subtilties of the understanding lead to the rankest unwisdom.

As a portraiture of individual character, Lear himself holds, to my mind, much the same pre-eminence over all others which I accord to the tragedy as a dramatic composition. Less complex and varied than Hamlet, the character is however more remote from the common feelings and experiences of human life. The delineation reminds me, oftener than any other, of what some one has said of Shakespeare, — that if he had been the author of the human heart, it seems hardly possible that he should have better understood what is in it, and how it was made. And here, I think, may be fitly applied to him one of his own descriptions:

> "So on the tip of his subduing tongue
> All kinds of argument and question deep,
> All replication prompt, and reason strong,
> For his advantage still did wake and sleep:
> To make the weeper laugh, the laugher weep,
> He had the dialect and different skill,
> Catching all passions in his craft at will."

The Poet often so orders his delineations as to start and propel the mind backwards over a large tract of memory. As in real life, the persons, when they first come to our knowledge, bring each their several dower of good or evil inherited from their past hours. What they are now, remembers what they were long ago; and in their to-day we have the slow cumulative result of a great many yesterdays. Thus even his most ideal characters are invested with a sort of historic verisimilitude: the effects of what they thought and did long before still remain with them; and in their present speech and action is opened to us a long-drawn

vista of retrospection. And this is done not in the way of narrative, but of suggestion; the antecedent history being merely implied, not related, in what is given. Sometimes he makes the persons speak and act from their *whole* character at once; that is, not only from those parts of it which are seen, but from those which lie back out of sight; from hidden causes, from motives unavowed, and even from springs and impulses of which the subject himself is not conscious. The effect of this is quite remarkable, and such as to outstrip the swiftest wing of analysis. It sends us right beyond the characters to Nature herself, and to the common elementary principles of all character; so touching the mind's receptive powers as to kindle its active and productive powers.

Lear is among the Poet's finest instances, perhaps his very finest, in this art of historical perspective. The old King speaks out from a large fund of vanishing recollections; and in his present we have the odour and efficacy of a remote and varied past. The play forecasts and prepares, from the outset, that superb intellectual ruin where we have "matter and impertinency mix'd, reason in madness"; the earlier transpirations of the character being shaped and ordered with a view to that end. Certain presages and predispositions of insanity are manifest in his behaviour from the first, as the joint result of nature, of custom, and of superannuation. We see in him something of constitutional rashness of temper, which moreover has long been fostered by the indulgences and flatteries incident to his station, and which, through the cripplings of age, is now working loose from the restraints of his manlier judgment. He has been a wise and good man, strong in reason, in just feeling, and rectitude of purpose, but is now decidedly past his faculties; which however, as often happens, is unapparent to him save as he feels it in a growing indisposition to the cares and labours of his office. So that there is something of truth in what Goneril says of him; just enough to make her appear the more hateful in speaking of it as she

does: "The best and soundest of his time hath been but rash; then must we look to receive from his age, not alone the imperfections of long-ingraffed condition, but therewithal the unruly waywardness that infirm and choleric years bring with them." He is indeed full of inconstant starts and petty gusts of impatience, such as are excusable only in those who have not yet reached, and those who have plainly outlived, the period of discretion and self-restraint.*

* Strange as it may seem, some of our very best criticism on Shakespeare has recently come from men skilled in the healing art, and bringing to the subject the ripe fruits of scientific study and professional experience. I can hardly name any one passage that throws so much light on the delineation of Lear as the following from Dr. Bucknill's essay on *The Psychology of Shakespeare*: "Essayists upon this drama have described Lear as an old man, who determines upon abdication and the partition of his kingdom, while he is of sane mind, and fully capable of appreciating the nature of the act. Thence it becomes necessary to view the original character of Lear as that of a vain, weak old man; thence it becomes necessary to view the first acts of the drama as a gross improbability. Such undoubtedly they would be, if they were the acts of a sane mind; but if, on the contrary, it be accepted that the mind of the old King has, from the first, entered upon the actual domain of unsoundness, the gross improbability at once vanishes, and the whole structure of the drama is seen to be founded not more upon 'an old story rooted in the popular faith' than upon the verisimilitude of nature. The accepted explanation of Lear's mental history, that he is at first a man of sound mind, but of extreme vanity and feeble power of judgment; and that, under the stimulus of subsequent insanity, this weak and shallow mind develops into the fierce Titan of passion, with clear insight into the heart of man, with large grasp of morals and polity, with terrible eloquence making known, as with the voice of inspiration, the heights and depths of human nature; that all this, under the spur of disease, should be developed from the sterile mind of a weak and vain old man, — this indeed is a gross improbability, in which we see no clew to explanation. Gross improbabilities of circumstance are not so rare in Shakespeare. The Weird Sisters in *Macbeth* and the Ghost in *Hamlet* are certainly not more probable as events than the partition of Lear's kingdom. But there is one kind of improbability which is not to be found in Shakespeare, — the systematic development of goodness from badness, of strength from weakness; the union of that which, either in the region of feeling or of intellect, is antagonistic and incompatible. — The consistency of Shakespeare is in no characters more close and true than in those most difficult ones wherein he portrays the development of mental unsoundness, as in Hamlet, Macbeth, and Lear; into these he throws the whole force of his genius: in these he transcends, not only all that other poets have effected before him, but all that he has ever done himself."

These growing infirmities of nature and time are viewed by his children with very different feelings. The two elder are inwardly glad of them. They secretly exult in the decays and dilapidations of his manhood as incapacitating him for his office, and so speeding their hopes of the inheritance. They know it is his disease to be gratified with such hollow and hyperbolical soothings as would else be the height of insolence. And so in the name of duty they study to inflame the waywardness that provokes their scorn. They *crave* reasons for persecuting him, and therefore will say any thing, will do any thing, to pamper the faults which at once prompt and seem to justify their contempt of him. In a word, it is their pleasure to bring oil to his fire, that he may the sooner be burnt out of their way.

With Cordelia all this is just reversed. The infirmities of a beloved and venerated father are things which she does not willingly see; when she sees, she pities them; and in a true filial spirit never thinks of them but as a motive to greater tenderness and respect. That his mind is falling out of tune, inspires her with the deeper reverence: she would rather go mad herself than see him do so. Partly from a conscious purpose, but more from an instinct of dutiful affection, she tries to assuage and postpone his distemper with the temperate speech of simple truth; duty and love alike forbidding her to stimulate his disease with the strong waters of fleering and strained hyperbole. Then too a fine moral tact seems to warn her that the medicine of reason must be administered to the dear old man in very gentle doses, else it will but feed his evil. And her treatment is well adapted to keep his faculties in tune, but that her holy purpose is baffled by the fulsome volubility of her sisters.

The first two speeches of the play inform us that the division of the kingdom has already been resolved upon, the terms of the division arranged, and the several portions allotted. This fact is significant, and goes far to interpret the subsequent action, inasmuch as it infers the trial of pro-

fessions to be but a trick of the King's, designed, perhaps, to surprise his children into expressions which filial modesty would else forbid. Lear has a morbid hungering after the outward tokens of affection: he is not content to know that the heart beats for him, but craves to feel and count over its beatings. The passion is indeed a selfish one, but it is the selfishness of a right-generous and loving nature. Such a diseased longing for sympathy is not the growth of an unsympathizing heart. And Lear naturally looks for the strongest professions where he feels the deepest attachment. "I lov'd her most, and thought to set my rest on her kind nursery," — such is his declared preference of Cordelia. And the same thing comes out still more forcibly when, hearing him speak of her as

> "Unfriended, new-adopted to our hate,
> Dower'd with our curse, and stranger'd with our oath,"

the King of France replies, —

> "This is most strange,
> That she, who even but now was your best object,
> The argument of your praise, balm of your age,
> The best, the dearest, should in this trice of time
> Commit a thing so monstrous, to dismantle
> So many folds of favour."

And the same doting fondness that suggested the device makes Lear angry at its defeat; while its success with the first two heightens his irritation at its failure with the third. Thwarted of his hope where he has centered it most and held it surest, his weakness naturally flames out in a transport of rage. Still it is not any doubt of Cordelia's love, but a dotage of his trick that frets and chafes him. For the device is a *pet* with him. And such a bauble of strategy would have had no place in his thoughts, had he been of a temper to bear the breaking of it. Being thus surprised into a tempest of passion, in the disorder of his mind he at once forgets the thousand little daily acts that have insensibly wrought in him to love Cordelia most, and to expect most love from her. His behaviour towards her,

indeed, is like that of a peevish, fretful child who, if prevented from kissing his nurse, falls to striking her.

It is such a poor old piece of tetchy, impotent waywardness, whose forfeiture of respect no art seems capable of retrieving, that the Poet here repeals home to our deepest sympathies, and invests with the sacredest regards of humanity.

Men sometimes take a strange pleasure in acting without or against reason; since this has to their feelings the effect of ascertaining and augmenting their power; as if they could make a right or a truth of their own. It appears to be on some such principle as this that arbitrariness, or a making of the will its own reason, sometimes becomes a passion in men. Such a stress of self-will proceeds, I apprehend, on much the same ground as Sir Thomas Browne's faith, which delighted in making honours for itself out of impossibilities. That certain things could not be, was, he tells us, his strongest argument for believing them; that is, he felt the surer of his creed as it reversed the laws of thought, and grew by the contradictions of reason. The very shame, too, of doing wrong, sometimes hurries men into a barring of themselves off from retreat. And so it appears to be with Lear in his treatment of Cordelia. In the first place, he *will* do the thing because he knows it to be wrong; and then the uneasy sense of a wrong done prompts him to bind the act with an oath; that is, because he ought not to have driven the nail, therefore he *clinches* it. This action of mind is indeed abnormal, and belongs to what may be termed the border-land of sanity and madness; nevertheless something very like it is not seldom met with in men who are supposed to be in full possession of their wits.

How deeply the old King, in this spasm of wilfulness, violates the cherished order of his feelings, appears in what follows, but especially in his shrinking soreness of mind as shown when the Fool's grief at the loss of Cordelia is mentioned. The sense of having done her wrong sticks fast in his heart, and will not let him rest. And his remorse on

this score renders him the more sensitive to the wrongs that are done him by others. He could better endure the malice of his other daughters, but that it reminds him how deeply he has sinned against her love who has ever approved herself his best. Hence, when Goneril is stinging her ingratitude into him, he exclaims, —

> "O, most small fault,
> How ugly didst thou in Cordelia show!
> Which, like an engine, wrench'd my frame of nature
> From the fix'd place, drew from my heart all love,
> And added to the gall."

But the great thing in the delineation of Lear is the effect and progress of his passion in redeveloping his intellect. For the character seems designed in part to illustrate the power of passion to reawaken and raise the faculties from the tomb in which age has quietly inurned them. And so in Lear we have, as it were, a handful of tumult embosomed in a sea, gradually overspreading and pervading and convulsing the entire mass.

In his conscious fulness of paternal love, Lear confides unreservedly in the piety of his children. The possibility of filial desertion seems never to have entered his thoughts; for so absolute is his trust, that he can hardly admit the evidence of sight against his cherished expectations. Bereft, as he thinks, of one, he clings the closer to the rest, assuring himself that they will spare no pains to make up the loss. Cast off and struck on the heart by another, he flies with still greater confidence to the third. Though proofs that she too has fallen off are multiplied upon him, still he cannot give her up, cannot be provoked to curse her; he *will* not see, will not own to himself the fact of her revolt.

When, however, the truth is forced home, and he can no longer evade or shuffle off the conviction, the effect is indeed terrible. So long as his heart had something to lay hold of and cling to and rest upon, his mind was the abode of order and peace. But, now that his feelings are rendered

objectless, torn from their accustomed holdings, and thrown back upon themselves, there springs up a wild chaos of the brain, a whirling tumult and anarchy of the thoughts, which, till imagination has time to work, chokes down his utterance. Then comes the inward, tugging conflict, deep as life, which gradually works up his imaginative forces, and kindles them to a preternatural resplendence. The crushing of his aged spirit brings to light its hidden depths and buried riches. Thus his terrible energy of thought and speech, as soon as imagination rallies to his aid, grows naturally from the struggle of his feelings,— a struggle that seems to wrench his whole being into dislocation, convulsing and upturning his soul from the bottom. Thence proceeds, to quote Mr. Hallam, "that splendid madness, not absurdly sudden, as in some tragedies, but in which the strings that keep his reasoning powers together give way one after the other in the frenzy of rage and grief."

In the transition of Lear's mind from its first stillness and repose to its subsequent tempest and storm; in the hurried revulsions and alternations of feeling, — the fast-rooted faith in filial virtue, the keen sensibility to filial ingratitude, the mighty hunger of the heart, thrice repelled, yet ever strengthened by repulse; and in the turning up of sentiments and faculties deeply imbedded beneath the incrustations of time and place; — in all this we have a retrospect of the aged sufferer's whole life; the abridged history of a mind that has passed through many successive stages, each putting off the form, yet retaining and perfecting the grace of the preceding.

As to the picture here given of madness, it is such that I scarce dare undertake to speak of it in any words of my own. And probably the best I can do is by saying, what is indeed true, that men of the solidest science are accustomed to hold it as an authority in questions of that kind, consulting it and quoting it, as they would the history of an actual case. Nor am I aware of its having ever been

faulted as untrue to nature in a single point. Of course there can be nothing stronger or more decisive than this as to the merit of the workmanship: the praise implied is almost too great to be inherited by a man. That the Poet should have entered so perfectly into the consciousness of insanity as thus to project, not a mere likeness of the thing, but the very thing itself, is perhaps the greatest mystery of his genius. No philosophy has yet explained, or begun to explain the secret of it. To be sure, the same holds true of his other representations of madness. But this of Lear is in some respects the most wonderful of them all: for it is the resurgence of a decayed intellect, with the faculties wrenched into unhingement, and thrown into exorbitancy, by the fearful violence that has evoked them from their repose.

I must add somewhat touching the methods used for recovering the old King. — Cordelia asks the Physician, "What can man's wisdom in the restoring his bereavèd sense?" and he replies, —

> "There is means, Madam:
> Our foster-nurse of nature is repose,
> The which he lacks; that to provoke in him
> Are many simples operative, whose power
> Will close the eye of anguish."

"This reply," says Dr. Kellogg, "is significant, and worthy of careful attention, as embracing a brief summary of almost the only true principles recognized by modern science, and now carried out by the most eminent physicians in the treatment of the insane." So, again, in the directions for preventing a relapse:

> "Be comforted, good Madam: the great rage,
> You see, is cur'd in him; and yet 'tis danger
> To make him even o'er the time he has lost.
> Desire him to go in: trouble him no more
> Till further settling."

The late Dr. Brigham, a high authority in such matters, remarks that, "although near two centuries and a half have

passed since Shakespeare wrote this, we have very little to add to his method of treating the insane as thus pointed out. To produce sleep, to quiet the mind by medical and moral treatment, to avoid all unkindness, and, when the patients begin to convalesce, to guard, as he directs, against every thing likely to disturb their minds and cause a relapse, is now considered the best and nearly the only essential treatment."

Thus it appears that in this most difficult field of inquiry Shakespeare anticipated the ripest conclusions of scientific study and experience: which is the more remarkable inasmuch as the learned intellect of his age was still prepossessed with a mass of superstitious trumpery concerning magic, witchcraft, and demonology; and in the true spirit of that old system of thought insanity in all its forms was held to proceed from Satanic possession: charms, talismans, and exorcisms were the most approved remedies; while any thing like a rational and scientific treatment of the disease was commonly regarded as atheistic and profane. To question the doctrine of supernatural agency in the business, was little better than flat heresy. The whole matter was thus invested with religious terrorism and mystical predominance; the current and traditionary ideas being sanctioned by the Church, inculcated by the Clergy, and moulded into the very substance of the popular faith; the learned and the vulgar alike sharing in the old patrimony of delusion which taught that the world was full of malignant demons, whose pastime it was to *inspire* people with madness, and who were to be controlled by magic rites and muttered invocations. Even the best philosophy of the time was unable to shake off that ancient spell; Lord Bacon himself, with all his daring sagacity, being to the last an avowed disciple of the popular creed. So it was too with the best medical science of the time; Sir Theodore Mayence, who was physician to Queen Elizabeth and King James, expressly adhering to the received doctrine touching both the cause and the cure of mental disease.

If it be asked how Shakespeare, while the human mind all about him was thus enthralled to superstitious illusions and unrealities, came to work so near the soul of Nature and see things as they are, I can only point to the record, and leave the matter unexplained. But indeed this is only one of many proofs that, through some original and inherent virtue, his genius dwelt at "Nature's inner shrine, where she works most when we perceive her least." And perhaps he grew to a living fellowship with the true springs of intellectual light all the better for his little acquaintance with what had been delivered in books. His mind was evidently at home with the works of Nature and the words of Scripture, whose deeper meanings seem to have been the clearer to him, that his vision was undimmed with scholastic and theological mists.

Much ingenuity has been spent in trying to argue his works away from him, on the ground that a mind so little imbued with learning, as his is acknowledged to have been, could not possibly be so deep and clear in the truth of things. I notice the point now, merely to remark that no amount of imported assistance would really do any thing towards explaining such an intellectual phenomenon. For the very character of his works stands in an original, first-hand knowledge, such as could only come by talking with Nature face to face; and such native powers as he must have had, in order to do what he did, would have been rather incumbered and obscured than otherwise, by "all the learnings that his time could make him the receiver of." Had he been more addicted to looking at Nature through "the spectacles of books," or through other men's eyes, he would probably have seen less of her inward meaning, and been less happy and less idiomatic in his translation of it. Ben Jonson magnificently apostrophizes him as "Soul of the Age": and the supremacy of his genius lies in nothing else so much as in this, that he was indeed the soul of that age, with his forces working free and clear from "the recollected terms" and musty obstructions of a former age.

It is true that, like other builders of the highest order, he "builded better than he knew;" but this was because he followed the motions of an inward, living law, and not the set rules of a dead or expiring letter. Intellectual modesty in the highest degree, without a particle of imitative timidity, is the proper style of his workmanship. And as the spirit of a new era was to have its largest and clearest expression through him, so it behooved that his mind should take its growth apart from the influences of a superannuated erudition. If, for instance, his thoughts had been steeped in the current teachings on this very subject of madness, is it likely that he would have gone so far beyond his time in the real science of the thing? The armour that helped the knights of the Middle Ages would only oppress and hinder the modern warrior. And so the best help that Shakespeare could have in his intellectual walk was the being left to walk unhelped by any thing but the mental electricity with which his native atmosphere of thought was so highly charged.

In the trial of professions, there appears something of obstinacy and sullenness in Cordelia's answer, as if she would resent the old man's credulity to her sisters' lies by refusing to tell him the truth. But, in the first place, she is considerately careful and tender of him; and it is a part of her religion not to feed his dotage with the intoxications for which he has such a morbid craving. She understands thoroughly both his fretful waywardness and their artful hypocrisy; and when she sees how he drinks in the sweetened poison of their speech, she calmly resolves to hazard the worst, rather than wrong her own truth to cosset his disease. Thus her answer proceeds, in part, from a deliberate purpose of love, not to compete with them in the utterance of pleasing falsehoods.

In the second place, it is against the original grain of her nature to talk much about what she feels, and what she intends. Where her feelings are deepest, there her tongue is

stillest. She "cannot heave her heart into her mouth," for the simple reason that she has so much of it. And there is a virgin delicacy in genuine and deep feeling, that causes it to keep in the back-ground of the life; to be heard rather in its effects than in direct and open declarations. They love but little, who can tell how much they love, or who are fond of prating about it. To be staling itself with verbal protestations seems a kind of sacrilege and profanation. Thus love is apt to be tongue-tied; and its best eloquence is when it disables speech, and when, from very shame of being seen, it just blushes itself into sight. — Such is the beautiful instinct of true feeling to embody itself sweetly and silently in deeds, lest from showing itself in words it should turn to matter of pride and conceit. For a sentimental coxcombry is the natural issue of a cold and hollow heart.

It is not strange, therefore, that Cordelia should make it her part to "love and be silent." Yet she is in no sort a pulpy structure, or one whom it is prudent to trifle with, where her forces are unrestrained by awe of duty: she has indeed a delectable smack of her father's quality; as appears in that glorious flash of womanhood, when she so promptly switches off her higgling suitor:

> "Peace be with Burgundy!
> Since that respects of fortune are his love,
> I shall not be his wife."

Mrs. Jameson rightly says of Cordelia that "every thing in her lies beyond our view, and affects us in such a manner that we rather feel than perceive it." And it is very remarkable that, though but little seen and heard, she is nevertheless a sort of ubiquity in the play. All that she utters is but about a hundred lines; yet I had read the play occasionally for several years before I could fully realize but that she was among the principal speakers; and even to this day I carry to the reading a vague impression that her speech and presence are to fill a large part of the scene.

It is in this remoteness, I take it, this gift of presence without appearance, that the secret of her power mainly

consists. Her character has no foreground; nothing outstanding, or that touches us in a definable way: she is all perspective, self-withdrawn; so that she comes to us rather by inspiration than by vision. Even when she is before us we rather feel than see her; so much more being meant than meets the eye, that we almost lose the sense of what is shown, in the interest of what is suggested. Thus she affects us through finer and deeper susceptibilities than consciousness can grasp; as if she at once both used and developed in us higher organs of communication than the senses; or as if her presence acted in some mysterious way directly on our life, so as to be most operative within us when we are least aware of it. The effect is like that of a voice or a song kindling and swelling the thoughts that prevent our listening to it. In like sort, my hearing has often been so haunted with certain strains of music as to turn every stray sound into an image thereof; so that

> "The music in my heart I bore
> Long after it was heard no more."

The point is well illustrated in the case of the Gentleman whom Kent despatches to Cordelia with letters informing her of what has befallen her father. After watching her movements while reading the letters, and though she utters nothing in his presence but sighs and tears, the Gentleman returns mad with eloquence and poetry; as if Heaven had been opened upon him through her, and he

> "Had gaz'd and gaz'd, but little thought
> What wealth to him the show had brought."

What I have said of Cordelia's affection holds true of her character generally. For she has the same deep, quiet reserve of thought as of feeling; so that her mind becomes conspicuous by its retiringness, and draws the attention by shrinking from it. Though she nowhere says any thing indicating much intelligence, yet she always strikes us, somehow, as being very intelligent; and even the more so, that her intelligence makes no special report of itself. It is as if

she knew too much to show her knowledge. For the strongest intellects are by no means the most demonstrative; often they are the least so. And indeed what Cordelia knows is so bound up with her affections, that she cannot draw it off into expression by itself: it is held in perfect solution, so to speak, with the other elements of her nature, and nowhere falls down in a sediment, so as to be producible in a separate state. She has a deeper and truer knowledge of her sisters than any one else about them; but she knows them by heart rather than by head; and so can *feel* and *act*, but not *articulate*, a prophecy of what they will do. Ask her, indeed, what she thinks on any subject, and her answer will be that she thinks, — nay, she cannot *tell*, she can only show you what she thinks. For her thinking involuntarily shapes itself into life, not into speech; and she uses the proper language of her mind when, bending over her "child-chang'd father," she invokes Restoration to "hang his medicine on her lips"; or when, kneeling before him, she entreats him to "hold his hands in benediction o'er her." Here, again, "her mouth is much too narrow for her heart"; — it is indeed a small heart that the mouth is not too narrow for: — she remembers with inexpressible sorrow the curse he had pronounced upon her, — for a father's curse is a dreadful thing to a soul such as hers; — and her first concern is to have that curse turned into a blessing.

All which shows a peculiar fitness in Cordelia for the part she was designed to act; which was to exemplify the workings of filial piety, as Lear exemplifies those of paternal love. To embody this sentiment, the whole character in all its movements and aspects is made essentially religious. For filial piety is religion acting under the sacredest of human relations. And religion, we know, or ought to know, is a life, and not a language; and life is the simultaneous and concurrent action of *all* the elements of our being. Which is perfectly illustrated in Cordelia; who, be it observed, never thinks of her piety at all, because her piety keeps her thoughts engaged upon her father. And so she

reveals her good thoughts by veiling them in good deeds, as the spirit is veiled and revealed in the body; nay, has to be so veiled in order to be revealed; for, if the veil be torn off, the spirit is no longer there, but hides itself at once in immateriality.

Therefore it is that Cordelia affects us so deeply and so constantly without our being able to perceive how or why. And she affects those about her in the same insensible way; that is, she keeps their thoughts and feelings busy, by keeping her own hidden beneath what she does: an influence goes forth from her by stealth, and stealthily creeps into them; an influence which does not appear, and yet is irresistible, and irresistible even because it does not appear; and which becomes an undercurrent in their minds, circulates in their blood, as it were, and enriches their life with a beauty that seems their own, and yet is not their own: so that she steals upon us through them; and we think of her the more because they, without suspecting it, remind us of her.

> "Powers there are,
> That touch each other to the quick in modes
> Which the gross world no sense hath to perceive,
> No soul to dream of."

No one can see Cordelia, and be the same he was before, though unconscious the while of taking any thing from her. It is as if she secretly deposited about his person some mysterious, divine aroma which, when he is remote from her and not thinking of her, keeps giving out its perfume, and testifying, though he knows it not, that he has been with her.

Accordingly her father loves her most, yet knows not why; has no conscious reasons for the preference, and therefore cannot reason it away. Having cast her off from his bounty, but not out of his heart, he grows full of unrest, as if there were some secret power about her, like magic, which he cannot live without, though he did not dream of its existence when she was with him. And "since her going into France the Fool has much pined away"; as

though her presence were necessary to his health: so that he sickens upon the loss of her, yet suspects not wherefore, and knows but that she was by and his spirits were nimble, she is gone and his spirits are drooping.

Such is the proper influence of a right-minded and right-mannered woman on those about her: she knows it not, they know it not; her influence is all the better and stronger that neither of them knows it: she begins to lose it directly she goes about to use it and make them sensible of it: with noiseless step it glides into them unnoticed and unsuspected, but disturbs and repels them as soon as it seeks to make itself heard. For indeed her power lies not in what she values herself upon, and voluntarily brings forward, and makes use of, but in something far deeper and diviner than all this, which she knows not of and cannot help.

Finally, I know of nothing with which to compare Cordelia, nothing to illustrate her character by. An impersonation of the holiness of womanhood, herself alone is her own parallel; and all the objects that lend beauty when used to illustrate other things seem dumb or ineloquent of meaning beside her. Superior, perhaps, to all the rest of Shakespeare's women in beauty of character, she is nevertheless second to none of them as a living and breathing reality. We see her only in the relation of daughter, and hardly *see* her even there; yet we know what she is or would be in every relation of life, just as well as if we had seen her in them all. "Formed for all sympathies, moved by all tenderness, prompt for all duty, prepared for all suffering," we seem almost to hear her sighs and feel her breath as she hangs, like a ministering spirit, over her reviving father: the vision sinks sweetly and quietly into the heart, and, in its reality to our feelings, abides with us more as a remembrance than an imagination, instructing and inspiring us as that of a friend whom we had known and loved in our youth. After all, I am not sure but it were better to have emphasized her character with the single re-

mark of Schlegel: "Of Cordelia's heavenly beauty of soul I do not dare to speak."

It is an interesting feature of this representation, that Lear's faith in filial piety is justified by the event, though not his judgment as to the persons in whom it was to be found. Wiser in heart than in understanding, he mistook the object, but was right in the feeling. In his pride of sovereignty he thought to command the affection of his children, and to purchase the dues of gratitude by his bounty to them; but he is at last indebted to the unbought grace of Nature for that comfort which he would fain owe to himself; what he seeks, and even more than he seeks, coming as the free return of a love that thrives in spite of him, and which no harshness or injustice of his could extinguish. Thus the confirmation of his faith grows by the ruin of his pride. Such is the frequent lesson of human life. For the Fall has not more defaced the beauty of human character than it has marred our perception of what remains; and not the least punishment of our own vices is, that they take from us the power to discern the virtue of others. In passing from this part of the subject, need I add how, with what healing discipline, and what accessions of moral strength, we are here brought to converse with

> "Sorrow, that is not sorrow, but delight;
> And miserable love, that is not pain
> To hear of, for the glory that redounds
> Therefrom to human kind, and what we are"?

All this is indeed putting the great forces of tragic representation to their rightful service.

There is a strange assemblage of qualities in the Fool, and a strange effect arising from their union and position, which I am not a little at a loss how to describe. It seems hardly possible that Lear's character should be properly developed without him: indeed he serves as a common gauge and exponent of all the characters about him, — the mirror in which their finest and deepest lineaments are

reflected. Though a privileged person, with the largest opportunity of seeing and the largest liberty of speaking, he everywhere turns his privileges into charities, making the immunities of the clown subservient to the noblest sympathies of the man. He is therefore by no means a mere harlequinian appendage of the scene, but moves in vital intercourse with the character and passion of the drama. He makes his folly the vehicle of truths which the King will bear in no other shape, while his affectionate tenderness sanctifies all his nonsense. His being heralded by the announcement of his pining away at the banishment of Cordelia sends a consecration before him: that his spirit feeds on her presence hallows every thing about him. Lear manifestly loves him, partly for his own sake, and partly for hers; for we feel a delicate, scarce-discernible play of sympathy between them on Cordelia's account; the more so perhaps, that neither of them makes any explicit allusion to her; their very reserve concerning her indicating that their hearts are too full to speak.

I know not, therefore, how I can better describe the Fool than as the soul of pathos in a sort of comic masquerade; one in whom fun and frolic are sublimed and idealized into tragic beauty; with the garments of mourning showing through and softened by the lawn of playfulness. His "labouring to outjest Lear's heart-struck injuries" tells us that his wits are set a-dancing by grief; that his jests bubble up from the depths of a heart struggling with pity and sorrow, as foam enwreaths the face of deeply-troubled waters. So have I seen the lip quiver and the cheek dimple into a smile, to relieve the eye of a burden it was reeling under, yet ashamed to let fall. There is all along a shrinking, velvet-footed delicacy of step in the Fool's antics, as if awed by the holiness of the ground; and he seems bringing diversion to the thoughts, that he may the better steal a sense of woe into the heart. And I am not clear whether the inspired antics that sparkle from the surface of his mind are in more impressive contrast with the dark

tragic scenes into which they are thrown, like rockets into a midnight tempest, or with the undercurrent of deep tragic thoughtfulness out of which they falteringly issue and play.

Our estimate of this drama as a whole depends very much on the view we take of the Fool; that is, on how we interpret his part, or in what sense we understand it. Superficially considered, his presence and action can hardly seem other than a blemish in the work, and a hindrance to its proper interest. Accordingly he has been greatly misunderstood, indeed totally misconstrued by many of the Poet's critics. And it must be confessed that the true meaning of his part is somewhat difficult to seize; in fact, is not to be seized at all, unless one get just the right point of view. He has no sufferings of his own to move us, yet, rightly seen, he does move us, and deeply too. But the process of his interest is very peculiar and recondite. The most noteworthy point in him, and the real key to his character, lies in that while his heart is slowly breaking he never speaks, nor even appears so much as to think of his own suffering. He seems indeed quite unconscious of it. His anguish is purely the anguish of sympathy; a sympathy so deep and intense as to induce absolute forgetfulness of self; all his capacities of feeling being perfectly engrossed with the sufferings of those whom he loves. He withdraws from the scene with the words, "And I'll go to bed at noon"; which means simply that the dear fellow is dying, and this too, purely of others' sorrows, which he feels more keenly than they do themselves. She who was the light of his eyes is gone, dowered with her father's curse and strangered with his oath; Kent and Edgar have vanished from his recognition, he knows not whither, the victims of wrong and crime; the wicked seem to be having all things their own way; the elements have joined their persecutions to the cruelties of men; there is no pity in the Heavens, no help from the Earth; he sees nothing but a "world's convention of agonies" before him; and his straining of mind

to play assuagement upon others' woes has fairly breached the citadel of his life. But the deepest grief of all has now overtaken him; his old master's wits are all shattered in pieces: to prevent this, he has all along been toiling his forces to the utmost; and, now that it has come in spite of him, he no longer has any thing to live for: yet he must still mask his passion in a characteristic disguise, and breathe out his life in a play of thought. I know not whether it may be rightly said of this hero in motley, that he

> "hopes till Hope creates
> From its own wreck the thing it contemplates."

Need it be said that such ideas of human character could grow only where the light of Christianity shines? The Poet's conceptions of virtue and goodness, as worked out in this drama, are thoroughly of the Christian type, — steeped indeed in the efficacy of the Christian Ideal. The old Roman conception of human goodness, as is well known, placed it in courage, patriotism, honesty, and justice, — very high and noble indeed; whereas the proper constituents of the Christian Ideal are, besides these, and higher than these, mercy, philanthropy, self-sacrifice, forgiveness of injuries, and loving of enemies. It is in this sense that Shakespeare gives us the best expressions of the Christian Ideal that are to be met with in Poetry and Art. I am really unable to say what divines may have interpreted more truly or more inspiringly the moral sense, the *ethos* of our religion.

If the best grace and happiness of life consist, as this play makes us feel that they do, in a forgetting of self and a living for others, Kent and Edgar are those of Shakespeare's men whom one should most wish to resemble. Strikingly similar in virtues and situation, these two persons are notwithstanding widely different in character. Brothers in magnanimity and in misfortune; equally invincible in fidelity, the one to his King, the other to his father; both driven to disguise themselves, and in their disguise

both serving where they stand condemned; — Kent, too generous to control himself, is always quick, fiery, and impetuous; Edgar, controlling himself even because of his generosity, is always calm, collected, and deliberate. For, if Edgar be the more judicious and prudent, Kent is the more unselfish of the two: the former disguising himself for his own safety, and then turning his disguise into an opportunity of service; the latter disguising himself merely *in order* to serve, and then perilling his life in the same course whereby the other seeks to preserve it. Nor is Edgar so lost to himself and absorbed in others but that he can and does survive them; whereas Kent's life is so bound up with others, that their death plucks him after. Nevertheless it is hard saying whether one would rather be the subject or the author of Edgar's tale:

> "Whilst I was big in clamour, came there a man
> Who, having seen me in my worst estate,
> Shunn'd my abhorr'd society; but then, finding
> Who 'twas that so endur'd, with his strong arms
> He fasten'd on my neck, and bellow'd out
> As he'd burst heaven; threw him on my father;
> Told the most piteous tale of Lear and him
> That ever ear receiv'd; which in recounting,
> His grief grew puissant, and the strings of life
> Began to crack: twice then the trumpet sounded,
> And there I left him tranc'd.
> *Albany.* But who was this?
> *Edgar.* Kent, sir, the banish'd Kent; who in disguise
> Follow'd his enemy King, and did him service
> Improper for a slave."

It is rather curious to note how the characteristic traits of these two men are preserved even when they are acting most out of character: so that, to us who are in the secret of their course they are themselves and not themselves at the same time. For example, in Kent's obstreperous railing at the Steward, and his saucy bluntness to Cornwall and Regan, we have a strong relish of the same impulsive and outspoken boldness with which he beards the old King

when the latter is storming out his paroxysm against Cordelia, and meets his threats by daring him to the worst: "Do; kill thy physician, and the fee bestow upon the foul disease." Of course, in those transports of abusive speech and of reckless retort, he is but affecting the slang-whanger as a part of his disguise: moreover he wants to raise a muss, and embroil Lear with his two daughters, and thereby draw the latter into a speedy disclosure of what he knows to be in their hearts; because his big manly soul is still on fire at the wrong Lear has done to Cordelia, and he would fain hasten that repentance which he knows must sooner or later come: still it is plain enough to us that his tumultuous conduct is but an exaggerated outcome of his native disposition; or, in other words, that he is truly himself all the while, only a good deal more so; a hiding of his character in a sort of overdone caricature. So too the imitative limberness and versatility which carry Edgar smoothly through so many abrupt shiftings of his masquerade are in perfect keeping with the cool considerateness which enables him to hold himself so firmly in hand when he goes to assume the style of a wandering Bedlamite. He acts several widely different parts, but the same conscious self-mastery and the same high-souled rectitude of purpose, which form the backbone of his character, are apparent in them all.

In Kent and Oswald we have one of those effective contrasts with which the Poet often deepens the harmony of his greater efforts. As the former is the soul of goodness clothed in the assembled nobilities of manhood; so the latter is the very extract and embodiment of meanness; two men than whom "no contraries hold more antipathy." To call the Steward wicked were a waste of language: he is absolutely beneath the sense of that term; one of those convenient pack-horses whereon guilt often rides to its ends. Except the task of smoothing the way for the passions of a wicked mistress, no employment were base enough for him. None but a reptile like him could ever have

got hatched into notice in such an atmosphere as Goneril's society: were he any thing else, there could not be sympathy enough between them to admit the relation of superior and subaltern.

This play has many scenes and passages well worth our special noting. I must content myself with glancing at two or three.

The scene of Edgar and the eyeless Gloster, where the latter imagines himself ascending the chalky cliff at Dover, and leaping from it, is a notable instance of the Poet's power to overcome the inherent incredibility of a thing by his opulence of description. Great as is the miracle of Gloster's belief, it is in some sort authenticated to our feelings by the array of vivid and truthful imagery which induces it. Thus does the Poet, as occasion requires, enhance the beauty of his representation, so as to atone for its want of verisimilitude.

Some of Lear's speeches amid the tempest contain, I think, the grandest exhibition of creative power to be met with. They seem spun out of the very nerves and sinews of the storm. It is the instinct of strong passion to lay hold of whatever objects and occurrences lie nearest at hand, and twist itself a language out of them, incorporating itself with their substance, and reproducing them charged with its own life. To Lear, accordingly, and to us in his presence, the storm becomes all expressive of filial ingratitude; seems spitting its fire, and spouting its water, and hurling its blasts at his old white head. Thus the terrific energies and convulsions of external nature take all their meaning from his mind; and we think of them only as the glad agents or instruments of his daughters' malice, leagued in sympathy with them, and taking their part in the controversy. In this power of imagination thus seizing and crushing the embattled elements into its service, there is a sublimity almost too vast for the thoughts. Observe, too, how the thread of association between moral and material nature

conducts Lear to the strain of half-insane, half-inspired moralizing, which he closes with the pathetic exception of himself from the list of those to whom the tempest speaks as a preacher of repentance and "judgment to come."

The surpassing power of this drama is most felt in the third and fourth Acts, especially those parts where Lear appears.* The fierce warring of the elements around the old King, as if mad with enmity against him, while he seeks shelter in their strife from the tempest within him; his preternatural illumination of mind when tottering on the verge of insanity; his gradual settling into that unnatural calmness which is more appalling than any agitation, because it marks the pause between order gone and anarchy about to begin; the scattering-out of the mind's jewels in the mad revel of his unbound and dishevelled faculties, till he finally sinks, broken-hearted and broken-witted, into the sleep of utter prostration; — all this joined to the incessant groanings and howlings of the storm; the wild, inspired babblings of the Fool; the desperate fidelity of Kent, outstripping the malice of the elements with his ministries of love; the bedlamitish jargon of Edgar, whose feigned madness, striking in with Lear's real madness, takes away just enough of its horror, and borrows just enough of its dignity, to keep either from becoming insupportable; † —

* O, what a world's convention of agonies is here! All external nature in a storm, all moral nature convulsed, — the real madness of Lear, the feigned madness of Edgar, the babbling of the Fool, the desperate fidelity of Kent, — surely such a scene was never conceived before or since! Take it but as a picture for the eye only, it is more terrific than any which a Michael Angelo, inspired by a Dante, could have conceived, and which none but a Michael Angelo could have executed. Or let it have been uttered to the blind, the howlings of Nature would seem converted into the voice of conscious humanity. — COLERIDGE.

† The intellectual and excited babbling of the Fool, and the exaggerated absurdities of Edgar, are stated by Ulrici and other critics to exert a bad influence upon the King's mind. To persons unacquainted with the character of the insane, this opinion must seem, at least, to be highly probable, notwithstanding that the evidence of the drama itself is against it; for Lear is comparatively tranquil in conduct and language during the whole period of Edgar's mad companionship. It is only after the Fool has disappeared, — gone to sleep

the whole at last dying away into the soft, sweet, solemn discourse of Cordelia, as though the storm had faltered into music at her coming; and winding up with the revival of Lear, his faculties touched into order and peace by the voice of filial sympathy: — in all this we have indeed a masterpiece of art, of which every reader's feelings must confess the power, though perhaps no analysis can ever fathom the secret.

In conclusion, I must refer briefly to the *improvement* which this mighty drama has suffered at the hands of one Nahum Tate; an inprovement inflicted for the purpose, as would seem, of dwarfing and dementing the play down to the capacity of some theatrical showman. A part of Tate's work lay in rectifying the catastrophe, so as to have Lear and Cordelia come off triumphant, thus rewarding their virtue with worldly success. The cutting-out of the precious Fool, and the turning of Cordelia into a love-sick hypocrite, who feigns indifference to her father, in order to cheat and enrage him, and thus make him abandon her to a forbidden match with Edgar, completes this execrable piece of profanation. Tate improve *King Lear!* Set a tinker at work, rather, to improve Niagara!

ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA.

The Tragedy of Antony and Cleopatra was never printed that we know of till in the folio of 1623. As to the time when it was written, the most that we have to proceed upon, aside from the qualities of the work itself, is an entry at the Stationers' by Edward Blount, May 20,

at midday, as he says, — and Edgar has left, to be the guide of his blind father, that the King becomes absolutely wild and incoherent. The singular and undoubted fact was probably unknown to Ulrici, that few things tranquillize the insane more than the companionship of the insane. It is a fact not easily explicable; but it is one of which, either by the intuition of genius or by the information of experience, Shakespeare appears to have been aware. —Dr. Bucknill.

1608, of "a book called Antony and Cleopatra." Whether Shakespeare's drama were the "book" referred to in this entry, is something questionable, as the subject was at that time often written upon, dramatically or otherwise. Of course the entry was made with the design of publication; so that, if it refer to the play in hand, either such design must have miscarried, or else the edition has been utterly lost. Blount was one of the publishers of the first folio; and in the entry made by him and Jaggard at the Stationers,' November 8, 1623, *Antony and Cleopatra* is among the plays set down as "not formerly entered to other men." Which certainly favours the conclusion that the entry of 1608 referred to the same play.

There is perhaps no point in the early history of the English stage more certain than that the theatrical companies took every precaution in order to keep their plays out of print. And we have strong ground for believing that, after the edition of *Hamlet* in 1604, there was no authorized issue of any of the Poet's dramas during his lifetime. This may have been, and probably was, the cause of there being no edition of this play in pursuance of the entry in question.

Knight and Verplanck argue that Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* was not written till after the date of Blount's entry, and that this entry referred to some other performance; their main reason being the admitted fact that the style of this play bespeaks the Poet's highest maturity of mind. I agree, however, with Malone and Collier in assigning the composition to 1607, or the early part of 1608, when the author was in his forty-fourth year. This brings it within the same five years of his life, from 1605 to 1610, which witnessed the production of *Macbeth* and *King Lear*. It will hardly be questioned that at the time of writing these dramas the Poet's mind was equal to any achievement within the compass of human thought. Nor can I taste any peculiarities of style in this play, as distinguished from the proper tokens of dramatic power, that should needs

infer any more ripeness of mind than in case of the other dramas of that period.

In *Antony and Cleopatra*, the drawings from history, though perhaps not larger in the whole than we find in some other plays, are, however, more minute and circumstantial. Here the Poet seems to have picked and sifted out from old Plutarch, with the most scrupulous particularity, every fact, every embellishment, and every line and hint of character, that could be wrought coherently into the structure and process of the work; the whole thus evincing the closest study and the exactest use of the matter before him. Notwithstanding, his genius is as far as ever from seeming at all encumbered with help, or anywise cramped or shackled by the restraints of history: on the contrary, his creative faculties move so freely and play so spontaneously under and through the Plutarchian matter, that the borrowings seem no less original than what he created, and the inventions no less historical than what he borrowed. I say inventions, for many of the finest scenes and passages are purely such: yet these seem to have caught the very spirit and method of the old material; so that the whole work is perfectly fused into one substance, all the parts being just as much of the same grain and texture as if they had originally grown together.

It is well known that even in matters of history fictions often express the real truth of things much better than any facts which history has preserved. This, to be sure, may sometimes proceed from a kind of psychological comparative anatomy, whereby a sagacious mind, from a small relic of fact, a single tooth or bone, as it were, reconstructs the living whole. Take, for instance, the early part of the 17th century: I suppose no competent judge will question that many of the leading characters, as well as the manners and spirit of that time, are far better delivered by Sir Walter Scott in *The Fortunes of Nigel* than in any so-called authentic history of the same period. And it may be safely

affirmed that in this drama, as in others of an historical nature, the Poet never cares to draw upon his inventive powers, save when by so doing he can bring out the truth of his characters more vividly, more dramatically, and even more fairly, than it is conveyed in the forms and incidents which the history offered him; not to mention that he often extracts and concentrates the life and efficacy of many incidents in one representative invention; thus giving the substantial truth of them all, without the literal truth of any one. Nor, closely as he here works to the record, is there any one of his dramas wherein he shows a more fertile and pregnant inventiveness; many of the scenes being perfectly original, and at the same time truer to the history *in effect* than the history is to itself. For it is not too much to say that he had the art to express what was in his persons far better than they knew how to express it themselves. How he could thus endow them with his own intellect, or with so much of it as they needed, without disturbing their individuality at all, or impairing their proper self-consciousness, is a mystery which perhaps no effort of criticism can solve.

Soon after the overthrow of Brutus and Cassius at Philippi, which occurred in the Fall of the year B. C. 42, the Triumvirs, Octavius, Antony, and Lepidus, partitioned the Roman world among themselves, Antony taking the Eastern provinces as his share. The next year, while on his way with an army against the Parthians, he summoned Cleopatra to meet him in Cilicia, and give an account of her recent doings in aid of Brutus and Cassius. She responded in the celebrated adventure in which she caught the amorous Triumvir, and "pursed up his heart upon the river of Cydnus." In his account of this conquest, the Poet does little more than translate the delectable old narrative of Plutarch into dialogue. The result of the affair was that Cleopatra led Antony captive to Alexandria, where he lost himself in the prodigious revelries and sen-

sualities of the Egyptian Court. Thereupon his ferocious wife, Fulvia, together with his brother Lucius, who was then Consul, raised a war in Italy against Octavius, her purpose being, it was said, to disenchant her husband and draw him back to Rome. In the Spring, however, of the year 40 B. C., Fulvia died; from which event dates the opening of the play.

In the course of the same year Antony was married to Octavia; by which marriage the difficulties of the two Triumvirs were expected to be permanently healed; though, as the issue proved, "the band that seemed to tie their friendship together was the very strangler of their amity." This was followed, the next year, by the treaty with Sextus Pompey at Misenum. For some four years, Antony, in form at least, kept his faith with Octavia, who bore him two children. But, with all her beauty and wisdom and illustrious virtues, she could make no abiding impression upon him: his thoughts kept flying back to Egypt. In the year B. C. 36, he set forth on another expedition against the Parthians, and sent an invitation to Cleopatra to join him; and on her doing so he fell more hopelessly than ever under her enchantment, lavishing realms and cities upon her as if the whole world were his, and he valued it only that he might give it to her. I will here condense a brief portion of North's Plutarch, by way of indicating how the Poet uses the historian:

"Then began the pestilent mischief of Cleopatra's love to kindle again as soon as Antony came near unto Syria, and in the end did put out of his head all honest and commendable thoughts. Whilst he was preparing to make war with the Parthians, his wife, whom he had left at Rome, would needs take sea to come to him. Her brother was willing to it, not so much for any respect to Antony, as that he might have a colour to make war with him, if he should misuse her. But when she was come to Athens, she received letters from Antony, willing her to stay there until his coming. Though much grieved at this, knowing it was

but an excuse, yet she asked him by her letters whether he would have those things sent to him which she had brought, being great store of apparel for soldiers, sums of money and gifts to bestow on his friends and captains, and two thousand men well armed. When one of Antony's friends brought this news from Octavia, and withal did greatly praise her, Cleopatra, fearing she would be too strong for her, and win him away, subtly seemed to languish for love of Antony, pining her body for lack of meat. Furthermore, she so framed her countenance, that when Antony came to see her, she cast her eyes upon him like a woman ravished with joy. Straight, again, when he went from her, she fell a-weeping, and still managed that he should often find her weeping; and when he came suddenly upon her, she made as though she dried her eyes, and turned away her face as if unwilling he should see her weep. Then her flatterers blamed Antony, telling him he was a hard-natured man and had small love in him, that would see a poor lady in such torment for his sake. 'For Octavia,' they said, 'that was only married to him because of her brother's affairs, hath the honour to be called Antony's lawful wife; and Cleopatra, born a queen, is only named Antony's leman; yet she disdained not to be so called, if she might enjoy his company and live with him; but, if he once leave her, then it is impossible she should live.' By these flatteries they so wrought his effeminate mind that, fearing lest she should make herself away, he returned to Alexandria."

Once again at the Egyptian capital, Antony sank forthwith into a full-blown voluptuary. The accounts of his gigantic profligacy are indeed almost incredible, and would be thoroughly so, but for the support they derive from the well-known customs of the "gorgeous East." Still, however, Antony, as "a Roman thought struck him," varied his debaucheries from time to time with fits of spasmodic heroism in the camp and the field; though ever returning from these to plunge still deeper in the turbid stream of Oriental voluptuousness. In these fierce bacchanalian orgies, the

Queen was always at hand, pampering his grosser appetites with rank and furious indulgences, and stimulating his flagging zest in them by cunning surprises: whenever he showed a reviving taste for nobler pleasures, she was prompt to gratify it with works of art and literature; and sometimes, when the mood was on, she would call in the aids of philosophy and criticism, to reinforce the spells under which she held him. At length, she wound up the climax of extravagance by arraying herself in the garb and claiming the prerogatives of the goddess Isis, at the same time inducing Antony to usurp the titles and attributes of the god Osiris. The notion that a man might rise to union with deity had gradually hardened into a custom of admitting the royal right of apotheosis. Some years before, Antony had assumed the character and style of Bacchus at Athens. He now came forth as the Nile-god, or fructifying power of the Coptic mythology, to claim the religious veneration of the Egyptian people.

All these mad doings were closely watched by the cold-blooded and astute Octavius, who worked them with terrible effect against his rival at Rome. And his purpose herein was greatly furthered by the noble behaviour of Octavia, who still kept her husband's house at Rome, and devoted herself religiously to the care of his children, both her own and those that Fulvia had borne him, as if she thought of nothing but to approve herself in every thing a true and loyal wife. By this course she only knit the hearts of the Roman people still more firmly to her cause; so that they resented Antony's sins against her almost as much as they did those against the national honour and religion.

The quarrel thus engendered and fostered came to a head in the great battle of Actium, which took place in September of the year B. C. 31. Stripped of fleet and army, and covered with shame and foul dishonour, Antony returned to Egypt to brood sullenly over the past. The next year, Octavius followed with an army, and his work there was finished by the death of Cleopatra in August. So that the

events of the play cover a period of a little more than ten years; the scene shifting to various parts of the Empire, Alexandria, Rome, Misenum, Athens, the plains of Syria, and several fields of battle.

I must add one more short passage from Plutarch as aptly showing the minuteness of detail with which the drama follows the history. It refers to the intercourse of Octavius and Antony after the marriage of the latter with Octavia: "With Antony there was a soothsayer of Egypt, that could judge of men's nativities, to tell what should happen to them. He, either to please Cleopatra, or because he found it so by his art, told Antony that his fortune, which of itself was good and great, was altogether blemished and obscured by Cæsar's; and therefore he counselled him to get as far from him as he could. 'For thy demon,' said he, 'that is, the good angel that keepeth thee, is afraid of his; and, being courageous and high when alone, becometh fearful and timorous when near the other.' Howsoever it was, the events ensuing proved the Egyptian's words true: for it is said that as often as they drew cuts for pastime, or whether they played at dice, Antony always lost. Oftentimes, when they were disposed to see cock-fights, or quails that were taught to fight one with another, Cæsar's cocks or quails did ever overcome. The which spited Antony in his mind, although he made no outward show of it; and therefore he believed the Egyptian the better."

Judging by my own experience, *Antony and Cleopatra* is the last of Shakespeare's plays that one grows to appreciate. This seems partly owing to the excellences of the work, and partly not. For it is marked beyond any other by a superabundance of external animation, as well as by a surpassing fineness of workmanship, such as needs oft-repeated and most careful perusal to bring out full upon the mind's eye. The great number and variety of events crowded together in it, the rapidity with which they pass

before us, and, consequently, the frequent changes of scene, hold curiosity on the stretch, and somewhat overfill the mind with sensuous effect, so as for a long time to distract and divert the thoughts from those subtilties of characterization and delicacies of poetry which everywhere accompany them. In the redundancy of incidental interest and excitement, one cannot without long familiarity so possess his faculties as to pause and take time for such recondite and protean efficacies to work their proper effect. I am by no means sure but the two things naturally go together; yet I have to confess it has long seemed to me, that by selecting fewer incidents, or by condensing the import and spirit of them into larger masses, what is now a serious fault in the drama might have been avoided.

Bating this defect, if indeed it be a defect, there is none of Shakespeare's plays which, after many years of study, leaves a profounder impression of his greatness. In quantity and variety of characterization, it is equalled by few, and hardly surpassed by any, of his dramas. Antony, Cleopatra, Octavius, Octavia, Lepidus, Pompey, Enobarbus, not to mention divers others of still less presence on the scene, are perfectly discriminated and sustained to the last; all being wrought out in such distinct, self-centred, and self-rounded individuality, that we contract and keep up a sort of personal acquaintance with each and every one of them. In respect of style and diction, too, the best qualities of the Poet's best period are here concentrated in special force. The play abounds, more than any other, in those sharp, instantaneous jets of poetic rapture, a kind of vital ecstasy, which keep the experienced reader's mind all aglow with animation and inward delight. The compressed and flashing energy, striking in new light from the very hardness of that which resists; the stern and solid ground-work of thought, with fresh images, or suggestions of images, shooting up from it ever and anon, kindling the imagination with all the force of surprise, and setting their path on fire by the suddenness and swiftness of their coming; while their

"piercing sweetness" prints a relish on the taste that adds zest and spirit to the whole preparation; — such, not indeed exclusively, but in a peculiar degree, are the characteristics of this astonishing drama.

But I hardly dare speak my own sense of the work without the support of better judgments. "Of all Shakespeare's historical plays," says Coleridge, "*Antony and Cleopatra* is by far the most wonderful. There is not one in which he has followed history so minutely, and yet there are few in which he impresses the notion of angelic strength so much; perhaps none in which he impresses it more strongly. The highest praise, or rather form of praise, which I can offer in my own mind, is the doubt which the perusal always occasions in me, whether this play is not, in all the exhibitions of a giant power in its strength and vigour of maturity, a formidable rival of *Macbeth*, *Lear*, *Hamlet*, and *Othello*. *Feliciter audax* is the motto for its style comparatively with that of Shakespeare's other works, even as it is the general motto of all his works compared with those of other poets."

Nor is this "happy valiancy" by any means confined to the matter of style. The drama is equally daring, equally audacious, in a moral sense. For, as regards the hero and heroine, it is a noteworthy point how little we feel or think of any moral or immoral quality in their doings. In their intoxication of empire, of self-aggrandizement, and of mutual passion, they fairly overshoot the whole region of duty and obligation. To themselves and to each other, they are simply gods: as such, their freedom is absolute: they transcend all relative measures, and know no centre or source of law outside of their own personality: their own wills are their ultimate reason, their supreme law; the moral gravitation of the world having, as it were, no hold upon them, nor any right to control them. We have a hint of this in the opening of the play, when Cleopatra says, "I'll set a bourn how far to be belov'd," and Antony replies, "Then must thou needs find out new heaven, new earth." And still more a little

after, when he crowns her enchanting banter with the words, —

> "Let Rome in Tiber melt, and the wide arch
> Of the rang'd empire fall! Here is my space.
> Kingdoms are clay: our dungy earth alike
> Feeds beast as man: the nobleness of life
> Is to do thus; when such a mutual pair,
> And such a twain can do't; in which I bind,
> On pain of punishment, the world to weet
> We stand up peerless."

But are they in any sort excusably sincere in all this? I answer, Yes, they are. For, in the first place, the passion which mainly absorbs them naturally carries with it a sense of infinitude, insomuch that all things else seem as nothing in comparison either with itself or with its object. And, in the second place, as I have already observed, the Eastern notions of human apotheosis had gradually invaded and leavened the mind of the West. This was most notably exemplified in the national deification of the great Julius soon after his death; which evidently could not have been done, but that the Roman mind had long been in a secret course of preparation for it. Practically the same thing was done with Augustus and his successors even before their death. And indeed it may well be thought that nothing less than a reputed deity in human form would then suffice to hold the Roman world in order; a deep social need thus suggesting and shaping the individual faith. An attenuated form of the same thing has survived even down to our time in the doctrine of the divine right of kings and the divine right of bishops: whether it ought to have survived or not, is beside my present purpose.

Now there is no good reason why the great Roman Triumvir and the angelic "serpent of old Nile" should not have shared in this common belief of their time. The Poet freely grants them the benefit of this delusion, at the same time lending them all the aid of his genus, that they may play it out to their heart's content, and also to its legitimate results in the fate that so sternly shuts down upon them at last.

Nor is the effect of the thing any the less in keeping, that it assumes in them the character of a high-wrought poetical frenzy. That was the ancient heathen notion of divine possession. And the Poet makes us sympathize so far with their magnificent infatuation, that we cheerfully accord to them a sort of special privilege and exemption. Thus their action leaves our moral feelings altogether behind, and indeed soars, or, which comes to the same thing, sinks, quite beyond their ken. Nay, more; our thoughts and imaginations take with them, so to speak, a glad holiday in a strange country where the laws of duty undergo a willing suspension, and conscience temporarily abdicates her throne. Nor are we anywise damaged by this process. Rather say, the laws of duty are all the sweeter to us after such a brief escape from them; mark, I say escape from them, not transgression of them; which is a very different thing. So that the drama is perfectly free from any thing approaching to moral taint or infection. The very extravagance of the leading characters causes their action to be felt by us as strictly exceptional. In fact, we no more think of drawing their rules to us or ours to them, than we do of claiming the liberty of a comet with its eccentric orbit and long tail. We merely enjoy the vision of its pranks, and take no license from them. In this respect, the play, I grant, illustrates just as high a reach of moral audacity as seems compatible with moral purity.*

Another very remarkable feature of this drama lies in what may be termed the author's personal relation to the work. The leading characterization is steeped in a most

* I find a similar view well expressed in Heraud's *Inner Life of Shakespeare:* "We have already witnessed the Poet looking down, as a superior intelligence, on the loves of Troilus and Cressida, and sporting as an equal with those of Venus and Adonis. We have now to see him identifying himself with two mortals at the height of fortune, who, in a species of heroic madness, had conceived themselves to be in the position of Divine Powers. This is the elevation at which Shakespeare sustains his argument, and this prevents it from becoming immoral, as it does in the hands of Dryden, who paints his heroine and hero as mere human persons indulging in voluptuous and licentious habits. No notion of guilt attaches to the conduct of Shakespeare's

refined and subtle guile. Every now and then we catch an arch twinkle of glorious mischief peeping from the Poet's eye; though never in a manner or to a degree that is at all inconsistent with perfect earnestness and perfect innocence of delineation. This, to be sure, is a personal quality, and therefore it required to be managed with consummate art, lest it should disturb the dramatic equanimity and calmness of the work, or tinge the individuality of the persons with a colour not properly their own. Thus the Poet himself is in this play more than in any other except *King Henry the Fifth*, though only in the sense of an intellectual and impersonal presence.

Of this most delicate and unobtrusive irony Enobarbus is the organ, who serves the office of a chorus in the play, to interpret between the author and his audience. Through him the Poet keeps up a secret understanding with us, all the while inwardly sporting himself with his characters, and laughing at them, yet at the same time gravely humouring their extravagances and clothing them with his most cunning style. For, if you note it well, I think you will feel that Enobarbus is himself far from understanding the deep wisdom and sagacity of what he utters. It is as if some pure intelligential spirit were at his side, inspiring him with thoughts quite beyond his unaided reach. Thus the Poet seems to be invisibly present with him, to witness what is going on, and at the same time to play with and moralize the events and persons of the scene.

Nevertheless Enobarbus is to all intents and purposes one of the persons of the drama, and not in any sort a mere

Antony and Cleopatra either in the Poet's opinion or their own. They consciously acknowledge, and therefore trangress, no law. They live in an ideal region, far above the reach of a moral code, and justify their acts on the warranty of their own nature. They swear by and recognize no higher power than themselves. That this is a false position there is no doubt; and the Poet, by the catastrophe of his tragedy, shows it to have been such. But while the divine revels last the actors in them fully believe that they are the divinities whom they would represent. They sit on thrones outside the circle of the round globe, and repose on couches which float in air like clouds, and never touch the surface of the planet."

personified emanation of the author. His individual being stands as firm and inviolate as that of any of the characters; his personality being no more displaced or impaired by the Poet's intellectual presence than that of the sacred penmen was by the Power that inspired them to and for their appointed work. So that we have in him at once a character and a commentary. Of course, therefore, I do not mean but that the man is just as much himself as if there were nothing in him or coming from him but himself; my idea being that Shakespeare merely transfuses into him so much of his own sense of things as would answer the purpose in question. The point, in short, is just this: In case of the other persons, the Poet does not inspire them at all; he only delivers them, and this too without any thing of himself in them; in Enobarbus he does both.

To illustrate and to approve what I have been saying, it seems needful to quote a few of this man's words. Thus, near the opening of the play, when Antony tells him he is going to leave Egypt:

"*Eno.* Cleopatra, catching but the least noise of this, dies instantly; I have seen her die twenty times upon far poorer moment: I do think there is mettle in death, which commits some loving act upon her, she hath such a celerity in dying.

Ant. She is cunning past man's thought.

Eno. Alack, sir, no; her passions are made of nothing but the finest part of pure love: we cannot call her winds and waters sighs and tears; they are greater storms and tempests than almanacs can report: this cannot be cunning in her; if it be, she makes a shower of rain as well as Jove.

Ant. Would I had never seen her!

Eno. O, sir, you had then left unseen a wonderful piece of work; which not to have been bless'd withal would have discredited your travel."

Here I cannot doubt that we have Shakespeare's own ironical interpretation of the matter in question. Why, the pith of the whole drama is covertly insinuated in this brief passage. It would not be easy to produce a finer instance of dramatic guile. And with what smooth celerity the

speaker's thought shifts its hues at each instant of the expression! twinkling out his satire with an art as subtile as that of the heroine herself. So too, after the marriage of Antony and Octavia, when the latter is taking leave of her brother, and we have this bit of dialogue aside:

> "*Eno.* Will Cæsar weep?
> *Agrip.* He has a cloud in 's face.
> *Eno.* He were the worse for that were he a horse;
> So is he, being a man.
> *Agrip.* Why, Enobarbus,
> When Antony found Julius Cæsar dead,
> He cried almost to roaring; and he wept
> When at Philippi he found Brutus slain.
> *Eno.* That year, indeed, he was troubled with a rheum;
> What willingly he did confound he wail'd,
> Believe 't, till I wept too."

In these sharp jets of pungent humour, which touch the very core of both Octavius and Antony, do we not taste the Poet's own sense of those characters? And again, in what Enobarbus says to himself when Antony so absurdly dares Octavius to a personal duel:

> "Yes, like enough, high-battled Cæsar will
> Unstate his happiness, and he stag'd to th' show
> Against a sworder! — I see men's judgments are
> A parcel of their fortunes; and things outward
> Do draw the inward quality after them,
> To suffer all alike. That he should dream,
> Knowing all measures, the full Cæsar will
> Answer his emptiness! — Cæsar, thou hast subdu'd
> His judgment too."

For one more instance, take his piercing reflections when Antony, after the fierce shame of Actium, raves out his desperate valour:

> "Now he'll outstare the lightning. To be furious,
> Is to be frighted out of fear; and in that mood
> The dove will peck the estridge. I see still
> A diminution in our captain's brain
> Restores his heart: When valour preys on reason,
> It eats the sword it fights with. I will seek
> Some way to leave him."

Thus, throughout, his caustic wit and searching irony of discourse interpret with remorseless fidelity the moral import of the characters and movements about him. But, aside from his function as chorus, he is perhaps, after Octavia, the noblest character in the drama. His blunt, prompt, outspoken frankness smacks delightfully of the hardy Roman soldier brought face to face with the orgies of a most un-Roman levity; while the splitting of his big heart with grief and shame for having deserted the ship of his master, which he knew to be sinking, shows him altogether a noble vessel of manhood. That Antony's generosity kills him, approves, as nothing else could, how generous he is himself. The character is almost entirely the Poet's own creation, Plutarch furnishing but one or two unpregnant hints towards it.

In the case of Lepidus, also, the historian could have yielded but a few slight points towards the character as drawn by Shakespeare. The Lepidus of the play, the "barren-spirited fellow," the "slight unmeritable man meet to be sent on errands," bears a strong likeness to the veritable pack-horse of the Triumvirate, trying to strut and swell himself up to the dimensions of his place, and thereby of course only betraying his emptiness the more. Such appears to have been about the real pitch and quality of the man, according to the notices given of him by other writers; as Paterculus, for example, who calls him *vir omnium vanissimus:* but whether the Poet used any of those authorities, or merely drew from his own intuitive knowledge of human nature, is a question not easily answered. Vain, sycophantic, unprincipled, boobyish, he serves as a capital butt to his great associates, while his very elevation only renders him a more provoking target for their wit. Their playing upon him at Pompey's feast, when his poor brain is greased and his tongue made thick with wine, and the acute burlesque which Enobarbus soon after runs upon his "green sickness," are among the spicy things of the drama.

In the play of *Julius Cæsar*, the "noble Lepidus" is described as one that feeds

> "On objects, arts, and imitations
> Which, out of use and stal'd by other men,
> Begin his fashion."

Which is but a poetical version of what Falstaff says of Justice Shallow, as he knew him in his youth at Clement's-Inn: "He came ever in the rearward of the fashion, and sung those tunes to the overscutch'd huswives that he heard the carmen whistle, and sware they were his Fancies and his Good-nights."

Octavius, who for more than forty years after the battle of Actium was the acknowledged master of the Roman world, is probably the most intricate and inscrutable character in history. In his plenitude of political astuteness, he seems to have understood, better than any other man we read of, that his true strength was to hold still, and let his adversaries rot themselves with motion. The later historians, as Merivale and Smith, find that the one principle which gave aim and unity to his earlier life, and reconciled all his seeming contradictions of behaviour, was a fixed resolution to avenge the slaughter of his mighty uncle and adoptive father, whose mantle had fallen upon him, and who, as he believed, would from his seat among the gods hold the ægis of Providence over him. Be this as it may, at different times he acted in the opposite extremes of cruelty and clemency; yet not, for so it appears, because he was either cruel or clement at heart, but from an insight, or from an instinct, it is uncertain which, of the largest and deepest policy. Under a cold, polished, reserved, and dignified exterior, he concealed a soul of indomitable energy, and a tenacity of purpose which no vicissitudes could shake. His state of mind at the close of life is thus described by Merivale: "He had made peace with himself, to whom alone he felt himself responsible; neither God nor man, in his view, had any claim upon him. The nations had not proclaimed

him a deity in vain; he had seemed to himself to grow up to the full proportions they ascribed to him." In this shape, be it observed, we have the old age of one who, a cool, shrewd, subtle youth of nineteen, had suffered neither interest nor vanity to warp his judgment, nor any roving imaginations to hinder the accomplishment of his purposes.

Schlegel and others have justly observed that the great fame and fortune of Augustus did not prevent Shakespeare from seeing through him, and understanding his character rightly; yet he managed the representation so adroitly as not to offend the prevalent opinion of the time, which, dazzled by the man's astonishing success, rated him much above his true measure. The Poet sets him forth as a dry, passionless, elastic diplomatist: there is not a generous thought comes from him, except in reference to his sister; and even then there is something ambiguous about it; it seems more than half born of the occasion he has to use her for his self-ends. But then, as he has no keen tastes nor kindling enthusiasms, so he is also free from all illusions. He is just the man for the full-souled Antony to think of with scorn, even while the dread of his better stars holds him to a constrained and studied respect. His artful tackings and shiftings, to keep the ship of State, freighted as it is with the treasure of his own ascendency, before the gale of Fortune, make a fine contrast to the frank and forthright lustihood of Antony, bold and free alike in his sinnings and his self-accusings. Octavius is indeed plentifully endowed with prudence, foresight, and moderation; which, if not themselves virtues, naturally infer, as their root and basis, the cardinal virtue of self-control: and the cunning of the delineation lies partly in that the reader is left to derive them from this source, if he be so disposed; while it is nevertheless easy to see that the Poet regards them as springing not so much from self-control, as from the want of any hearty impulses to be controlled.

Octavia has furnishings enough for the heroine of a great

tragedy; but she is not fitted to shine in the same sphere with Cleopatra, as her mild, steady, serene light would needs be paralyzed by the meteoric showers of the Egyptian enchantress. The Poet has hardly done justice to her sweet and solid qualities; and indeed, from the nature of the case, the more justice she had received, the more she would have suffered from the perilous brilliancy of her rival. Yet he shows that he fully knew and felt her beauty and elevation of character, by the impression that others take of her. Her behaviour in the play is always dignified, discreet, and womanly; while her "holy, cold, and still conversation," the dreaded chastisements of her sober eye, her patience, modesty, and silent austerity of reproof, as these are reflected from the thoughts of those who have given themselves most cause to wish her other than she is, gain her something better than our admiration. The Poet's good judgment in not bringing her and Cleopatra together is deservedly celebrated. But indeed there needed less of intellectual righteousness than he possessed, to see that such a woman as Octavia shines best in the modesty that keeps her from shining, especially when such an unholy splendour is by. Her best eulogy, considering the known qualities of her husband, is written in the anguish of jealousy which Cleopatra suffers on learning the fact of Antony's marriage; wherein, by the way, all the witching arts of the queenly siren are for the moment quenched in the natural feelings of the woman:

> "O Iras! Charmian! — 'Tis no matter. —
> Go to the fellow, good Alexas; bid him
> Report the feature of Octavia, her years,
> Her inclination; let him not leave out
> The colour of her hair: bring me word quickly. —
> Let him forever go: — let him not, Charmian:
> Though he be painted one way like a Gorgon,
> The other way's a Mars. — Bid you Alexas
> Bring me word how tall she is. — Pity me, Charmian,
> But do not speak to me. — Lead me to my chamber."

"Her beauty was not so passing, nor such as upon pres

ent view did enamour men with her, but so sweet was her company and conversation that a man could not but be taken. And, besides her beauty, the good grace she had to talk and discourse, her courteous nature that tempered her words and deeds, was as a spur that pricked to the quick; for her tongue was an instrument of music to divers sports and pastimes, the which she easily turned into any language that pleased her." — Such is Plutarch's idea of the heroine as rendered in the racy old English of Sir Thomas North.

Cleopatra is, I think, Shakespeare's masterpiece in female characterization. There is literally no measuring the art involved in the delineation. As Campbell the poet remarks, "he paints her as if the gipsy herself had cast her spell over him, and given her own witchcraft to his pencil." The character is made up of indescribable subtilty and intricacy, and presents such a varied and many-shaded complexion of opposite traits, that I cannot but fancy Shakespeare to have delighted in stretching his powers upon it, and perhaps delighted all the more, forasmuch as it put him to his best exercise and proof of skill. For the delineation seems, throughout, a keen wit-match between the heroine and the Poet, which of them shall be the more daringly brilliant and divinely wicked, she in her movements, or he in his delivery of them. Yet the very stress of the work only serves, apparently, to inspire him the more, so that nothing exceeds his grasp, nothing eludes it; his matchless subtilty of intellect fairly permeating every part of the subject, like a kind of diffusive touch.

Accordingly the heroine as here depicted is an inexhaustible magazine of coquetry: yet all along in her practice of this, and even in part as the motive and inspirer of it, there mingles a true and strong attachment, and a warm and just admiration of those qualities which ennoble the manly character. Her love is at once romantic and sensual, blending the two extremes of imagination and appetite: she is proud, passionate, ambitious, false, revengeful; abounding in wit, talent, tact, and practical sense; inscrutable in cun-

ning and in the strategy of inventive passion for attaining its ends; vain, capricious, wilful, generous, and selfish; impulsive and deliberate, drifting before her passions and at the same time controlling them. Yet all these traits are carried on with a quickness and vital energy that never flags nor falters; and all are fused into perfect consistency by the very heat, as it were, of their mutual friction. And this strange combination is all woven about with such a versatility and potency of enchantment, that there is no resisting her nor escaping from her; none, that is, where the answering susceptibilities are in life. All these qualities, moreover, seem perfectly innate and spontaneous: nevertheless she is fully conscious of them, and has them entirely in hand, trained and disciplined to move at the bidding of her art. There is, in short, an essential magic about her, that turns the very spots and stains of her being into enchantment. And, what is perhaps most wonderful of all, while one knows that her power over him is but as the spell and fascination of a serpent, this knowledge still further disables him from shaking it off; nay, the very wonder how she can so fascinate becomes itself a new fascination. So that we may well say, with Enobarbus,

> "Age cannot wither her, nor custom stale
> Her infinite variety: other women cloy
> The appetites they feed, but she makes hungry
> Where most she satisfies; for vilest things
> Become themselves in her."

Of course it is impossible to illustrate in full the points of such an ever-changing physiognomy; for in so frolicsome and fugitive an expression, which turns to something new each instant, before you can catch it in any one form it has passed into another. I can but instance the two extremes between which her host of moods and tenses is bounded. The first is when, as Antony is on the eve of quitting Egypt for Rome, she so artfully banters and teases him into a fume, and then instantly charms it all away with a word of queenly eloquence:

" *Cleo.* Nay, pray you, seek no colour for your going,
But bid farewell, and go : when you su'd staying,
Then was the time for words : no going then ; —
Eternity was in our lips and eyes,
Bliss in our brows' bent ; none our parts so poor,
But was a race of Heaven : they are so still,
Or thou, the greatest soldier of the world,
Art turn'd the greatest liar.

Ant. Quarrel no more, but be prepar'd to know
The purposes I bear ; which are, or cease,
As you shall give the advice : By the fire
That quickens Nilus' slime, I go from hence
Thy soldier, servant ; making peace or war,
As thou affectest.

Cleo. Cut my lace, Charmian, come ; —
But let it be : — I'm quickly ill, and well :
So Antony loves.

Ant. My precious Queen, forbear ;
And give true evidence to his love, which stands
An honourable trial.

Cleo. So Fulvia told me.
I pr'ythee, turn aside, and weep for her ;
Then bid adieu to me, and say the tears
Belong to Egypt : good now, play one scene
Of excellent dissembling ; and let it look
Like perfect honour.

Ant. You 'll heat my blood : no more.

Cleo. You can do better yet ; but this is meetly.

Ant. Now, by my sword, —

Cleo. And target. — Still he mends :
But this is not the best ; — look, pr'ythee, Charmian,
How this Herculean Roman does become
The carriage of his chafe.

Ant. I'll leave you, lady.

Cleo. Courteous lord, one word.
Sir, you and I must part, — but that's not it :
Sir, you and I have lov'd, — but there's not it ;
That you know well : something it is I would —
O, my oblivion is a very Antony,
And I am all forgotten !

Ant. But that your royalty
Holds idleness your subject, I should take you
For idleness itself.

Cleo. 'Tis sweating labour

To bear such idleness so near the heart
As Cleopatra this. But, sir, forgive me;
Since my becomings kill me, when they do not
Eye well to you. Your honour calls you hence;
Therefore be deaf to my unpitied folly,
And all the gods go with you! upon your sword
Sit laurell'd victory! and smooth success
Be strew'd before your feet!"

The other instance is in the scene at the Monument, just as the hero has breathed his last:

"*Cleo.* Noblest of men, woo't die?
Hast thou no care of me? shall I abide
In this dull world, which in thy absence is
No better than a sty? — O, see, my women,
The crown o' the Earth doth melt. — My lord! my lord! —
O, wither'd is the garland of the war,
The soldier's pole is fallen! young boys and girls
Are level now with men; the odds is gone,
And there is nothing left remarkable
Beneath the visiting Moon."

Here she sinks down in a swoon; then, on reviving, and hearing her women call out, "Royal Egypt! Empress!"

"No more but e'en a woman, and commanded
By such poor passion as the maid that milks,
And does the meanest chares. — It were for me
To throw my sceptre at th' injurious gods,
To tell them that this world did equal theirs
Till they had stol'n our jewel. All's but nought;
Patience is sottish, and impatience does
Become a dog that's mad: then is it sin
To rush into the secret house of death,
Ere death dare come to us? — How do you, women?
What, what! good cheer! Why, how now, Charmian!
My noble girls! — Ah, women, women, look,
Our lamp is spent, it's out! — Good sirs, take heart:
We'll bury him; and then, what's brave, what's noble,
Let's do it after the high Roman fashion,
And make death proud to take us. Come, away: —
This case of that huge spirit now is cold."

Between these two opposite poles, so to speak, of art and passion, there is indeed room for an "infinite variety" of transpiration. Yet the whole interspace is filled with the

most nimble and versatile play of witchery and expression. It may be strange that features so diverse and seemingly-oppugnant should be made to sit together smoothly and naturally in the same character, but so it is.

In the real greatness of Antony, united as it is with just the right kind and degree of weakness, Cleopatra's pride, passion, vanity, and ambition have an object that they can all meet and draw together upon. To her enthusiastic fancy, he is "the demi-Atlas of this Earth, the arm and burgonet of men": his heroism in his better hours, his eloquence of speech and person at all times, and his generous and magnificent dispositions, kindle whatsoever of womanhood there is in her nature: and for all these reasons she glories the more in knowing that "her beck might from the bidding of the gods command him"; and the dearest triumph of her life is, that, while her "man of men" is in Rome and she in Egypt, she can still overtake him with her sorcery, and pull him back to her side, outwrestling at once his duty, his interest, his honour, and even, what is stronger than any or all of these, his ambition.

It is to be noted, however, that while Cleopatra has a deep and absorbing passion, yet she never, till all her regal hopes are clearly at an end, loses the queen in the lover. Her passion grows and lives partly in the faith that Antony is the man to uphold her state, and "piece her throne with opulent kingdoms." And, whatever may be said of her as a woman, it cannot well be denied that as a queen her thoughts are high, and her bearing magnanimous. This strong element of policy is the reason why Antony so often mistrusts her, as it is also the motive that puts her at last to trying her wiles upon Octavius, when she finds herself in his power. There she has a hard game to play: that most impenetrable of statesmen is indeed proof against her arts; nevertheless he is fairly outcrafted by her; and so her last breath of exultation is in addressing the asp at her breast,—

> "O, could'st thou speak,
> That I might hear thee call great Cæsar ass
> Unpolicied!"

All this, to be sure, was virtually contained in the history as Shakespeare found it. But I think he nowhere shows more fertility or more felicity of art and invention in so ordering the situations and accompaniments as to bring out the full sense of the characters. It scarce need be said, that the inexpressible fascinations with which he has clothed the heroine almost gain for her the same "full supremacy" over the reader which she wields over the hero; insomuch that at the close he is ready to exclaim with Octavius over her lifeless form, —

> "She looks like sleep,
> As she would catch another Antony
> In her strong toil of grace."

As to the moral effect of the delineation, I cannot do better than to leave it in the hands of the poet Campbell: "Playfully interesting to our fancy as Shakespeare makes this enchantress, he keeps us far from a vicious sympathy. The asp at her bosom, that lulls its nurse asleep, has no poison for our morality. A single glance at the devoted and dignified Octavia recalls our homage to virtue; but with delicate skill he withholds the purer woman from prominent contact with the wanton Queen, and does not, like Dryden, bring the two to a scolding match."

Mark Antony is regarded by our best historians as one of the most mixed and at the same time one of the least artificial characters of antiquity. With the seeds both of great virtues and great vices in his nature, he was educated into habits of more-than-military frankness under the great Julius, in whose school of Epicurean free-thinkers his tastes and principles were mainly formed. While the master lived, his wild and boisterous impulses were measurably awed and restrained. But as he had nothing of the natural justness and harmony of that stupendous man, so, such external restraint being withdrawn, those tastes and principles were not long in working out to their legitimate results. Though, at a need, he could act the part of a most profound dissem-

bler, yet his disposition was to be perfectly open, downright, and unreserved. Therewithal he had all the ambition of the first Cæsar, without any of his deep wisdom and policy to guide it, and all his recklessness of prescription too, but none of that native rectitude of genius which made it comparatively safe for him to be a law unto himself. Such, in brief, appears to be the character of the man as delivered in history.

Antony's leading traits, as Shakespeare renders them, have been to some extent involved in what I have said of the heroine. He is the same man here as in the play of *Julius Cæsar*, only in a further stage of development: brave and magnanimous to a fault, transported with ambition, and somewhat bloated with success; bold, strong, and reckless alike in the good and the bad parts of his composition; undergoing a long and hard struggle between the heroism and voluptuousness of his nature; the latter of which, with Cleopatra's unfathomable seductions to stimulate it, at last acquires the full sway and mastery of him. His powers are indeed great, but all unbalanced. Even when the spells of Egypt are woven thick and fast about him, the lingerings of his better spirit, together with the stinging sense of his present state, arouse him from time to time to high resolutions and deeds of noble daring: yet these appear rather as the spasms of a dying manhood than the natural and healthy beatings of its heart; the poison of a fevered ambition overmastering for a while the subtiler poison of a gorged and pampered sensuality. "There's a great spirit gone," he exclaims, on hearing of Fulvia's death; and long afterwards, when disaster and self-reproach overtake him, and his faith in the Queen is shaken, then the image of Octavia with "her modest eyes and still conclusion" reclaims his thoughts, and she is to him "a gem of women." But still he cannot unchain his soul from the "great fairy": however, in his fits of despondency, he may doubt her fidelity and resent her supposed treachery, yet she has but to play her forces upon him in person, and her empire is at once re-

established. Thus when she, weeping, comes upon him after the terrible disgrace of Actium:

> "*Ant.* O, whither hast thou led me, Egypt? See,
> How I convey my shame out of thine eyes
> By looking back what I have left behind
> 'Stroy'd in dishonour.
> *Cleo.* O my lord, my lord,
> Forgive my fearful sails! I little thought
> You would have follow'd.
> *Ant.* Egypt, thou knew'st too well
> My heart was to thy rudder tied by th' strings,
> And thou should'st tow me after."

And when she further entreats his pardon:

> "Fall not a tear, I say; one of them rates
> All that is won and lost: give me a kiss;
> Even this repays me."

Still better, when, some time later, he is in a flush of success, and she comes into his presence, glowing with admiration of his prowess:

> "O, thou day o' the world,
> Chain mine arm'd neck! leap thou, attire and all,
> Through proof of harness to my heart, and there
> Ride on the pants triúmphing."

Such is the thraldom to which his heart is reduced; yet it stands half excused to us by our own sense of the too potent witchcraft that subdues him. We think of him as "the noble ruin of her magic"; and of her magic too, as more an inspiration than a purpose, so that she can hardly help it. And he is himself sensible that under her mighty charms his manhood is thawing away, and thence takes a melancholy forecast or presentiment of the perdition that is coming upon him; a presentiment that is only bound the closer upon his thoughts by his inability to break the spell. The cluster and succession of images in which he dimly anticipates his own fall is unsurpassed for the union of poetry and pathos:

> "*Ant.* Eros, thou yet behold'st me?
> *Eros.* Ay, noble lord.
> *Ant.* Sometime we see a cloud that's dragonish;

A vapour sometime like a bear or lion,
A tower'd citadel, a pendent rock,
A forkèd mountain, or blue promontory
With trees upon 't, that nod unto the world,
And mock our eyes with air : thou'st seen these signs ;
They are black vesper's pageants.
Eros. Ay, my lord.
Ant. That which is now a horse, even with a thought
The rack dislimns, and makes it indistinct
As water is in water.
Eros. It does, my lord.
Ant. My good knave Eros, now thy Captain is
Even such a body : here I am Antony ;
Yet cannot hold this visible shape, my knave.
I made these wars for Egypt ; and the Queen, —
Whose heart I thought I had, for she had mine ;
Which, whilst it was mine, had annex'd unto 't
A million more, now lost ; — she, Eros, has
Pack'd cards with Cæsar, and false-play'd my glory
Unto an enemy's triumph. —
Nay, weep not, gentle Eros ; there is left us
Ourselves to end ourselves."

Here we have the great Triumvir's irregular grandeur of soul melting out its innermost sweets in the eloquence of sorrow.

Antony and Cleopatra seem made for each other: their fascination, howsoever begotten, is mutual; and if in the passion that draws and holds them together there be nothing to engage our respect, there is much that compels our sympathy. Witness the heroine's strain at the close :

" Give me my robe, put on my crown ; I have
Immortal longings in me : now no more
The juice of Egypt's grape shall moist this lip. —
Yare, yare, good Iras ; quick ! — Methinks I hear
Antony call ; I see him rouse himself
To praise my noble act : — husband, I come :
Now to that name my courage prove my title !
I'm fire and air ; my other elements
I give to baser life."

And when, on seeing Iras fall, she gives this as the reason for hastening to overtake her, —

> "If she first meet the curlèd Antony,
> He'll make demand of her, and spend that kiss
> Which is my Heaven to have," —

we feel that the poetry of passion can go no further. Our reprobation, too, of their life is softened with a just and wholesome flow of pity at their death.

Of the minor characters, the Queen's two favourite women, Charmian and Iras, especially the former, besides having no little interest in themselves, are full of *relative* significance. Their spirited, frolicsome levity and wantonness of thought and speech, together with their death-braving constancy to their mistress, show the moral and social qualities of the atmosphere which Cleopatra creates about her. The dialogue they hold with Alexas, Enobarbus, and the Soothsayer, in the second scene, is exceedingly artful; though not so much for what it contains as for what it suggests and infers. The intense sexuality of the heroine's thoughts, while it abates nothing of her charms in Antony's eyes, since his own thoughts are pitched in the same key, would however, if directly expressed, take off much of the fascination which she exercises and was meant to exercise upon us. And in fact we have only two or three hints of it from her mouth, though these are indeed charged to the utmost with meaning. But we have a vivid reflection of it in the talk of her nearest attendants, who of course habitually trim their tongues in the glass of her private example. Order is thus taken, in the outset of the play, that what the Queen's thoughts in this respect are made of shall become known to us *indirectly;* her dignity being thus spared, and yet her character discovered: for Shakespeare was by no means ignorant of the truth so strongly expressed in the saying of Burke, that in certain points "vice itself loses half its evil, by losing all its grossness."

I have but to add, that in this play we have for the most part a capital instance of dramatic organization; that is,

the parts, notwithstanding they are so numerous and varied, all appear to know their places, and to understand one another perfectly; insomuch that it seems impossible to change either the form or order of them without impairing their mutual intelligence.

CYMBELINE.

Shakespeare in his policy of authorship just reverses that of the popular fiction-writers of our day. Niggard of space, prodigal of thought, he uses the closest compression, they the widest expansion: his aim is to crowd the greatest possible wealth of mind into a given time; theirs, to fill the largest possible time with a certain modicum of matter. The difference is greatly owing, no doubt, to the different spirit of the present age, which requires the popular author to be a miser of his own time, and a spendthrift of the reader's.

The Poet's structure of language and mode of expression are in keeping with this policy, and indeed took their growth under its discipline. Nor is this all. His whole cast of dramatic architecture and composition proceeds by the same laws. In studying a work of his, the mind, if really alive, does not stop with the work itself; for indeed this stands in vital continuity with a world outside of itself. He so keeps the relations of things, that besides what is expressed a great many things are suggested, and far more is inferred than is directly seen. Whatever matter he has specially in hand to bring forward and press upon the attention, the delineation opens out into a broad and varied background and a far-stretching perspective, with seed-points of light shooting through it in all directions. Thus, if we look well to it, we shall find that in one of his dramatic groups the entire sphere of social humanity is represented, though sometimes under one aspect, sometimes

under another; for the variety of these is endless; and the mind, instead of being held to what is immediately shown, is suggested away, as by invisible nerves of thought, into a vast field of inference and reflection. This is because the part of nature, as he gives it, is *relative* to the whole of nature; isolated to the eye indeed, for so it must be, but not to the mind. Hence, in reading one of his plays the hundredth time, one finds not only new thoughts, but new trains of thought springing up within him. For indeed what he opens to us is not a cask, but a fountain, and is therefore literally inexhaustible.

And this habit of mind, if that be the right name for it, grew upon the Poet as he became older and more himself, or more practised in his art. It may almost be said indeed that his later works would be better, if they were not so good; they being so overcharged with life and power as rather to numb the common reader's apprehensive faculties than kindle them; and in fact it is doubtful whether the majority of those who read Shakespeare ever grow to a hearty relish of them. For average readers, he was better when less himself; and so I have commonly found such readers preferring his earlier plays. And it is remarkable that even some of his critics and editors, especially those of the last age, thought he must have been past his prime and in the decadence of his powers, when he wrote *Antony and Cleopatra*, which is perhaps his crowning instance of workmanship overcharged with poetic valour and potency. But, generally, in the plays of his latest period, we have his fiery force of intellect concentrating itself to the highest intensity which the language could be made to bear, and often exceeding even its utmost capacity; while in turn the language in his use became as a thing inspired, developing an energy and flexibility and subtilty such as may well make him at once the delight and the despair of all who undertake to write the English tongue. For he here seems a perfect autocrat of expression, moulding and shaping it with dictatorial prerogative; all this too, with the calmness

of a spontaneous omniloquence. In his hands, indeed, the language is like a grand cathedral organ, with its every touch at his instant command, from the softest notes which the most delicate spirit of sense can apprehend, to the lordliest harmonies that mortal hearing is able to sustain.

The Tragedy of Cymbeline, as it is called in the original copy, belongs, both by internal and external marks, to the last ten years of the Poet's life, — the same period which produced *Coriolanus*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, *The Tempest*, and *The Winter's Tale*. The only contemporary notice we have of it is from the *Diary* of Dr. Simon Forman, who gives with considerable detail the leading incidents of the play as he saw it performed somewhere between April, 1610, and May, 1611. It may be well to add that *Cymbeline*, as we learn by an entry of Sir Henry Herbert, Master of the Revels, was acted at Court in January, 1633, and was "well liked by the King"; which is to me an interesting fact in reference to that ill-starred Prince, Charles the First, who, whatever may be thought of him as a statesman and ruler, was undoubtedly a man of royal tastes in literature and art.

There is no reason to doubt that *Cymbeline* was fresh from the mint when Forman saw it. It has the same general characteristics of style and imagery as *The Tempest* and *The Winter's Tale;* while perhaps no play in the series abounds more in those overcrammed and elliptical passages which show too great a rush and press of thought for the author's space. The poetry and characterization, also, are marked by the same severe beauty and austere sweetness as in the other plays just named: therewithal the moral sentiment of the piece comes out, from time to time, in just those electric starts which indicate, to my mind, the Poet's last and highest stage of art.

The play was first printed in the folio of 1623, where it makes the last in the volume. It is there placed in the division of Tragedies, as *The Winter's Tale* is in that of

Comedies; though the two might, I think, with more propriety be set apart in a class by themselves. For in these instances the Poet gave himself up more unreservedly than ever to the freedom and variety of Nature, ordering the elements of dramatic interest in utter disregard of dramatic precedent. For the divisions of Tragedy and Comedy are arbitrary; there is nothing answering to them in human life: and why should the Drama be tied to any other conditions than those of human life? And Shakespeare seems to have thought that there was no reason or law of Art why *all* the forms of human transpiration should not run together just as freely in the Drama as they do in fact. If he had been a pedant, he would not have thought so; but he was not a pedant. Nor have we any reason to suppose that the folio arrangement of the plays was of his ordering: it was the work, no doubt, of the Editors, who classed the plays according to their general affinities; and signs are not wanting that they were sometimes at a loss how to place them.

In its structure, *Cymbeline* is more complex and involved than any other of the Poet's dramas. It includes no less than four distinct groups of persons, with each its several interest and course of action. First, we have Imogen, Posthumus, Pisanio, and Iachimo, in which group the main interest is centred; then, the King, the Queen, and Prince Cloten, the Queen's shrewd blockhead of a son, who carry on a separate scheme of their own; next, the Imperial representative, Lucius, who comes first as Roman Ambassador to reclaim the neglected tribute, and then as general with an army to enforce it; last, old Belarius and the two lost Princes, who emerge from their hiding-place to bear a leading part in bringing about the catastrophe. All these groups however, though without any concert or any common purpose of their own, draw together with perfect smoothness and harmony in working out the author's plan; the several threads of interest and lines of action being woven into one texture, richly varied indeed, but seeming

as natural as life itself; the more so perhaps, that the actors themselves know not how or why they are thus brought together.

The only part of the drama that has any historical basis is that about the demanding and enforcing of the Roman tribute. This Shakespeare derived, as usual in matters of British history, from Holinshed, who places the scene in the reign of the Emperor Augustus, and a few years before the beginning of the Christian era. The domestic part of the King's action, with all that relates to the Queen and Cloten, except the name of the latter, is, so far as we know, a pure invention of the Poet's; as is also the entire part of Belarius and the King's two sons, except that the names Guiderius and Arviragus were found in Holinshed. The main plot of the drama, except the strong part which Pisanio has in it, is of fabulous origin, the story however being used with the Poet's customary freedom of enrichment and adaptation.

What source Shakespeare drew directly from in this part of the work, is not altogether clear. During the Middle Ages, and under the Feudal system, heads of families were liable to be away from home, often for a long while together, in wars and military expeditions. Then too the hospitalities of those times were large and free, the entertainment of strangers and travellers being made much of in the code of ancient chivalry. Of course the fidelity both of husbands and wives was liable to be sorely tried during these long separations, the former by those whom they were meeting or visiting, the latter by those whom they were entertaining. It might well be, that absent husbands, full of confidence in those to whom and by whom the sacred pledge had been given, sometimes laid wagers on their fidelity, and encouraged or permitted trials of it to be made. Doubtless, also, there was many a polished libertine who took special pride in provoking some arrangement of the kind, or in making such trials without any arrangement. Thus questions turning on that point came to be matter of common and familiar interest, entering into the serious

thoughts of people far more than is the case in our time. So that there was no extravagance in the incident on which the main plot of this drama turns.

The chief points in the story seem to have been a sort of common property among the writers of Mediæval Romance. The leading incidents — as the wager, the villain's defeat, his counterfeit of success, the husband's scheme of revenge by the death of the wife, her escape, his subsequent discovery of the fraud, the punishment of the liar, and the final reunion of the separated pair — are found in two French romances of the thirteenth century, and in a French miracle-play of still earlier date. There are two or three rather curious indications that the miracle-play was known to Shakespeare, though this could hardly be, unless he read French. A rude version, also, of the story was published in a book called *Westward for Smelts*, and was entitled "The Tale told by the Fishwife of the Stand on the Green"; placing the scene in England in the reign of Henry the Sixth, and making the persons all English. This, however, cannot be traced further back than the year 1620, and there is no likelihood that the Poet had any knowledge of it. But the completest form of the story is in one of Boccaccio's Novels, the Ninth of the Second Day, where we have the trunk used for conveying the villain into the lady's bedchamber, his discovery of a private mark on her person, and her disguise in male attire. As these incidents are not found in any other version of the tale, they seem to establish a connection between the novel and the play. Boccaccio is not known to have been accessible to the Poet in English; but then it is quite probable, and indeed almost certain, that he was able to read Italian books in the original. The substance of the story is soon told.

Several Italian merchants, meeting in Paris, went to talking about their wives. All agreed in speaking rather disparagingly, except Bernabo, of Genoa, who said his wife was perfectly beautiful, in the flower of youth, and of unassailable honour. At this, Ambrogiulo became very loose-

spoken, boasting that he would spoil her honour, if opportunity were given him. The wager was then proposed and accepted. Going to Genoa, the intriguer soon found that Ginevra had not been overpraised, and that his wager would be lost, unless he could prevail by some stratagem. So he managed to have his chest left in her keeping, and placed in her private chamber. When she was fast asleep, with a taper burning in the room, he crept from his hiding, made a survey of the furniture, the pictures, and at last discovered a mole and a tuft of golden hair on her left breast. Then, taking a ring, a purse, and other trifles, he crept back into the chest.

Returning to Paris, he called the company together and produced his proofs of success. Bernabo was convinced, and went to seeking revenge. Arriving near home, he sent for his wife, and gave secret orders to have her put to death on the road. The servant stopped in a lonely place, and told her of his master's orders; she protested her innocence, and begged his compassion; so he spared her life, and returned with some of her clothes, saying he had killed her. Ginevra then disguised herself in male attire, and got into the service of a gentleman who took her to Alexandria, where she gained the Sultan's favour, and was made captain of his guard. Not long after, she was sent with a band of soldiers to Acre, and there, going into the shop of a Venetian merchant, she saw a purse and girdle which she recognized as her own. On her asking whose they were, and whether they were for sale, Ambrogiulo stepped forth and said they were his, and asked her to accept them as a gift; at the same time telling her they had been presented to him by a married lady of Genoa. Feigning pleasure at the tale, she persuaded him to go with her to Alexandria. Her next care was to have her husband brought thither. Then she prevailed on the Sultan to force from Ambrogiulo a public recital of his villainy; whereupon Bernabo owned that he had caused his wife to be murdered. She now assures the Sultan that, if he will punish the villain and pardon Berna

bo, the lady shall appear; and on his agreeing to this she throws off her disguise, and declares herself to be Ginevra, and the mole on her breast soon confirms her word: Ambrogiulo is put to death, and all his wealth given to the lady: the Sultan makes her rich presents of jewels and money besides, and furnishes a ship in which she and Bernabo depart for Genoa.

It may be gathered from this brief outline that in respect of character Imogen really has nothing in common with Ginevra. And indeed the Poet took none of his character from the novel, for this can hardly be said to have any thing of the kind to give; its persons being used only for the sake of the story, which order is just reversed in the play. But the novel presented certain obvious points of popular interest: these the Poet borrowed as a framework of circumstances to support his own original conceptions, evidently caring little for the incidents, as we care little for them, but in reference to this end.

I have spoken of the difficulty of classing *Cymbeline*, as it has too much of the tragic to be called a comedy, and yet not enough of it to be fairly ranked as a tragedy. Perhaps it may be taken as proof that the Gothic Drama, like the Gothic Architecture, is naturally capable of more variety than can be embraced within the ordinary rules of dramatic classification. Hazlitt describes it as a "dramatic romance"; which description probably fits it as well as any that can be given. For it has just enough of historical or traditionary matter to give it something of a legendary character, while its general scope admits and even invites the freest playing-in of whatsoever is wild and wonderful and enchanting in old Romance. By throwing the scene back into the reign of a semi-fabulous king, the Poet was enabled to cast around the work an air of historical dignity, and yet frame the whole in perfect keeping with the deep, solemn, and all but tragic pathos in which it is keyed. A confusion of times, places, and manners, with the ceremonial of old mythology

and the sentiments of Christian chivalry, the heroic deeds of earlier and the liberal ideas of later periods, all blended together without restraint and in the order merely of inherent fitness, the play has indeed some improbable incidents; yet the improbability is everywhere softened by distance, and even made grateful by the romantic sweetness, the sober wisdom, and the pathetic tenderness that spring up fresh and free in its course. All which may sufficiently account for the strong sentence some have put in against this play, and also for the equally strong and far wiser judgment of the poet Campbell, who regards it as "perhaps the fittest in Shakespeare's whole theatre to illustrate the principle, that great dramatic genius can occasionally venture on bold improbabilities, and yet not only shrive the offence, but leave us enchanted with the offender."

Schlegel pronounces *Cymbeline* "one of Shakespeare's most wonderful compositions." Few will deny that he has chosen the right word for the impression which the play leaves strongest in the mind. Several indeed surpass it in grandeur and vastness of design, but probably none in grace and power of execution. I cannot well conceive how a finer and more varied display of poetry and character could be reduced within the same compass. Except the vision and what pertains to it, in the fifth Act, of which I am to speak further presently, the most improbable of the incidents were, as we have seen, borrowed from general circulation, the story having been cast into divers forms, and already fixed in the popular belief. The incidents being granted, Shakespeare's ordering them to his use, the whole framing and managing of the plot so as to work out the result proposed, are exceedingly skilful and judicious. Take, for instance, the circumstances of the King's two sons having their home with the noble old exile in the mountain-cave, and of the heroine straying thither in disguise, faint and weary, and entering the rock in quest of food and rest, and what follows in her intercourse with the

princely boys; — what could be more delightful, what more inspiring of truth and purity than all this? Will any one say that the sweet home-breathings of Nature which consecrate these delectable scenes do not a thousand times make up for the strangeness of the incidents? Of course the leading purpose of the play is to be sought for in the character of Imogen. Around this, however, are ranged a number of subordinate purposes, running out into a large diversity of matter and person; yet all are set off with such artful blendings and transitions of light and shade, and grouped with such mastery of perspective and such picturesque effect, that every thing helps every other thing, and nothing seems out of place.

It is to be noted, also, that the persons, for the most part, have each their several plot, and are all at cross-aims with one another, so that the ground-work of the drama presents little else than a tissue of counter-plottings. And all are thwarted in their turn, and, what is more, the final result is brought about by their defeat; as if on purpose to illustrate again and again that men are not masters of their lot; and that, while they are each intent on their several plans, a higher Power is secretly working out other plans through them. Accordingly, if the bad thrive for a while, it is that they may at last be the more effectually caught and crushed in their own toils; if the good are at first cast down, it is that they may be uplifted in the end, and "happier much by their affliction made." And so, while the drama is bristling throughout with resolves and deeds, nevertheless all of them miscarry, all fail. It is the very prevalence, in part, of what we call chance over human design, that gives the work such a wild, romantic, and legendary character; making the impression of some supernatural power putting to confusion the works of men, that its own agency may be the more manifest in the order that finally succeeds.

The play, notwithstanding, has one very serious and decided blemish. I refer to that piece of dull impertinence in the fifth Act, including the vision of Posthumus while

asleep in the prison, the absurd "label" found on his bosom when he awakes, and the Soothsayer's still more absurd interpretation of the label at the close. For nothing can well be plainer than that the whole thing is strictly irrelevant: it does not throw the least particle of light on the character or motive of any person; has indeed no business whatever with the action of the drama, except to hinder and embarrass it. This matter apart, the *dénouement* is perfect, and the preparation for it made with consummate judgment and skill. And it is a noteworthy fact that, if the apparition, the dialogue that follows with the Jailer, the tablet, and all that relates to it, be omitted, there will appear no rent, no loose stitch, nor any thing wanting to the completeness of the work.

It is difficult to believe that Shakespeare wrote the passages in question at any time, impossible that he did so at or near the time when the rest of the play was written. For I think every discerning student will perceive at once that the style of this matter is totally different from that of all the other parts. How, then, came it there? Some consider it a relic of an older drama, perhaps one written by Shakespeare in his youth. But the more common opinion is, that it was foisted in by the players, the Poet himself having nothing to do with it. There is no doubt that such things were sometimes done. Still I am inclined to think that it was supplied by some other hand at the time, and that the Poet himself worked it in with his own noble matter, perhaps to gratify a friend; for he was a kind-hearted, obliging fellow, and probably did not see the difference between his own workmanship and other men's as we do. At all events, I am sure it must have got into the play from motives that could have had no place with him as an artist. And how well the matter was adapted to catch the vulgar wonder and applause of that day, may be judged well enough from the thrift that waits on divers absurdities of the stage in our time. Doubtless, in his day, as in ours, there were many who, for the sake of this blemishing stuff, would tolerate the glories of the play.

In Shakespeare's characteristic plays (for some of his earlier ones proceeded rather from imitation than character) there is always some one governing thought or organic idea, which serves, secretly perhaps, but not the less effectively, both as a centre of interest and as a law in the composition. This governing thought is often difficult, sometimes impossible to be seized and defined; a kind of corporate soul; something too "deeply interfused" to be done up in propositions, or expressed in logical forms. It is like the constitution of a State, which cannot be put into words, nor cribbed up in definitions; a silent, unwritten law, which is nevertheless felt and obeyed, the more so, perhaps, that nobody can tell why: in fact, it is rather a social power than a law; a power that governs men most when they are least aware of it. The old Greeks were acquainted with it, or something like it, under the name of "the omnipresent power of King Nomos." And in matters of art Criticism has often damaged both itself and its subject by undertaking to make definitions of that which naturally is not capable of them.

In *Cymbeline* the governing thought is more accessible to criticism than in most of its compeers; the very complexity of the work having perhaps caused that thought to be emphasized the more. For, varied as are the materials of the drama, there is notwithstanding a deep principle of inward harmony pervading them all, and binding them together in the strictest coherence. Gervinus, the German critic, was the first, I believe, who rightly apprehended this point. "We have only," says he, "to examine its several parts according to their internal nature, and refer to the motives, and we shall catch the idea which links them together, and perceive a work of art whose compass widens and whose background deepens in such a manner, that we can only compare it with the most excellent of all that Shakespeare has produced!" This "idea," as Gervinus here calls it, has its clearest illustration in the heroine. Imogen is an impersonation of the moral beauty of woman-

hood. This beauty is the vital current of the whole delineation, and every thing about her, her form, her features and expression, her dress, her walk, her speech, her every motion, all are steeped in its efficacy. Its leading development takes on the form of a calm, self-centred, immovable fidelity, all her other virtues coming out in the train of this. This virtue radiates from her into others, her presence acting as an inspiration of truth on most of those about her. Her husband is as strong in fidelity to her as she is to him: for it is observable that while they each believe the other to be false, this belief never so much as tempts either with a thought of becoming so. They may be betrayed, but they will not betray. The same virtue shines out equally in their man Pisanio, whom the Queen rightly describes as "a sly and constant knave, not to be shak'd." He deceives her indeed, or tries to do so, but only that he may be the truer where his obligations of truth are higher and more sacred. Nothing can start him from his fidelity. So too with the Court Physician, Cornelius, who knows the Queen's character thoroughly, as he also does her feelings towards the Princess; therefore he distrusts her, and his sharp practice in cheating her is all because he must and will be faithful to those against whom she is plotting. And the studied hypocrisy of the Courtiers proceeds from the same cause: not a man of them,

> "Although they wear their faces to the bent
> Of the King's looks, but hath a heart that is
> Glad at the thing they scowl at."

Whatever else may happen to them, they cannot choose but be true to Imogen. Thus on all sides the heroine's truth begets truth, or finds it; and the several instances of departure from it only serve to intensify it, and render it more pronounced. The Queen, to be sure, is deeply false, false to every thing but her son and her own ambition; while the King is too weak, and Cloten too wayward to be either false or true. Iachimo, too, begins a thorough-paced concentration of falsehood; but he learns a new lesson

from Imogen, and catches a soul of truth in his interview with her, which proves a seed of life, and keeps working in him, till it brings him out quite another man. And these exceptions, again, have the effect of emphasizing the leading thought by contrast, as the other instances just referred to do by reduplication. Finally, we have another issue of the same thing at bottom, in the stanch old manhood of Belarius. Many years back, two villains had falsely accused him to the King, who, preferring flattery to service, had thereupon stripped him of his possessions, and banished him. "Beaten for loyalty excited him to treason." In his first feeling of revenge, he caused the two infant Princes to be stolen from their nursery; but he has ever since been doing his best to build them up in all manly thoughts and virtues, that he might return them, as he does at last, far nobler men than court-breeding could have made them. Thus his fidelity approves itself the stronger and more fruitful in the end, for its temporary lapse; and he serves the King most truly when excluded from his service.

It is not very apparent why this play should be named as it is. For Cymbeline himself is but a cipher, having no value of his own, and all his value depending on what stands before him; that is, he has no force but to augment the force of somebody else. But his very impotence personally renders him important dramatically; that he has no spring in himself makes him in some sort the main-spring of the play. It was because he was weak that he drove Belarius into exile, and thus prepared one great source of wealth to the drama. It is for the same cause that he prefers the Queen's rickety, sputtering, blustering lump of flesh for his son-in-law, and banishes Posthumus, and withholds the Roman tribute. Therefore it is, too, that the Queen is able to hoodwink him so completely, that she feels safe in scheming against Imogen's life, and to that end gets the cordial which afterwards produces upon her the semblance of death. Hence, also, Cloten, with his empty head

and savage heart, is encouraged to that pitch of insolence which prompts the flight and disguise of Imogen, that she may have "no more ado with that harsh, noble, simple nothing, whose love-suit hath been to her as fearful as a siege." Thus the King's weakness proves the seed-plot of the entire action. So that I suspect the play is rightly named, though some have thought otherwise.

It is curious to note how consistently the poor King maintains, throughout, this character of weakness. We have a fine instance of it when he utters what is meant for a curse on his daughter, while he has not force enough really to make it such: "Let her languish a drop of blood a day, and, being aged, die of this folly." By "this folly," he means her love for Leonatus; and she herself would ask no greater happiness than to die at a good old age of that. Compare this with old Lear's terrible imprecations on his unkind daughters, which seem to steep themselves right into the heart of their objects, poisoning and blasting the innermost springs of life. Again, in the interview with the Roman Ambassador, the Queen and Cloten do the talking, the King merely echoing what they say, and thereby giving it the force of law. So too, when Cloten is off on his mad splurge of purposed murder and ravishment, and his mother's life is in danger with a fever of his absence, and the King finds a war on his hands, he is quite paralyzed, and has barely wit enough to deplore his want of wit:

> "Now for the counsel of my son and Queen!
> I am amaz'd with matter."

He is indeed uxorious to the last degree, yet we cannot call him a henpecked husband, for he does not make resistance enough for that process. And the lords and courtiers never think of blaming him for any thing that is done; in fact, they hardly respect him enough for that. But they know that the Queen has him perfectly under her thumb, and that he sees only with her eyes, and acts only as she plans. And the dotage sticks to him like a chronic disease. On being told how the Queen has been practising against Imogen's

life and his own, that she might work her sprawling hopeful into the adoption of the crown; and how, failing of this, she

> "Grew shameless-desperate; open'd in despite
> Of Heaven and men her purposes; repented
> The evils she hatch'd were not effected, so,
> Despairing, died"; —

still he cannot muster force enough to blame his weakness, but hugs it with the reflection, —

> "Mine eyes
> Were not in fault, for she was beautiful;
> Mine ears, that heard her flattery; nor my heart,
> That thought her like her seeming: it had been vicious
> To have mistrusted her."

Nor does he learn any thing by experience, his own or anybody's else; even his acknowledged blunders only strengthen his habit of blundering. Accordingly, at the close, when the missing Cloten is inquired for, and Pisanio relates how he had posted away, "with unchaste purpose, and with oath to violate my lady's honour," and the heroic youth frankly declares how and why he has killed the arrogant booby; still the King, with his mind all imprisoned in regal formulas, and losing the plainest principles of right in a mere literal legality, insists on condemning the valiant stranger to death; from which he is diverted by the assurance that the youth is his own son.

Cymbeline's character is further explained by that of the Queen, who rules, or rather misrules him. Her darling by a former husband she has set her heart upon matching with the Princess, who is expected to succeed her father in the kingdom: yet she seeks the match not so much from love of the poor clod as from a thirst of power, and partly because he is a clod, whom she thinks to manage, and thus secure her tenure of power. To this end, she has made the Court a place of incessant intrigue and machination, though in a rather small way. But she defeats her own shrewdness by overdoing it; like those overcrafty politicians whose ex-

cess of art and mystery renders them objects of suspicion and distrust. For she really deceives hardly any one except him who has most interest in not being deceived. The Princess understands her perfectly; and all her schemes are shattered in pieces against Imogen's firm, but quiet and unobtrusive discreetness. The courtiers hate and despise and fear the woman all at once; for they know both her malice and her cunning, and that if they openly cross her she will point her shafts against them, and at the same time screen herself behind the irresponsibility of the crown. They therefore smile as the King smiles, and frown as he frowns, because they know that his smiles and frowns express, not his own moods, but the Queen's. Thus her advantage over them explains the smooth dissimulation with which they parry her mischief. But their thoughts of her and her son come out, sometimes in their private talk, sometimes in pointed asides. At the close of a brief scene with Cloten, one of them soliloquizes the common feeling thus:

> "That such a crafty devil as his mother
> Should yield the world this ass! a woman that
> Bears all down with her brain; and this her son
> Cannot take two from twenty, for his heart,
> And leave eighteen. — Alas, poor Princess,
> Thou divine Imogen, what thou endur'st,
> Betwixt a father by thy step-dame govern'd,
> A mother hourly coining plots, a wooer
> More hateful than the foul expulsion is
> Of thy dear husband! The Heavens hold firm
> The walls of thy dear honour; keep unshak'd
> That temple, thy fair mind!"

The delineation of Cloten is very rich and full; partly in what he fumes or rattles out of himself, partly in the comments that are made about him. To the lords attending him, he is "a thing too bad for bad report." Yet in his presence they treat him with suppressed laughter and ironical praise; for he stirs no feeling in them so deep as wrath or even scorn. When he draws his sword on the banished Leonatus, the latter merely plays with him while seeming to

fight, and does not allow so much as his patience to be hurt; for he knows the poor roll of conceit will attribute his conduct to fear, and so think himself "alike conversant in general services, and more remarkable in single oppositions." Imogen bears his persecutions with calm patience, till he lets off an insolent strain of abuse against her exiled husband: then she quickly gives him enough, at the same time regretting that he puts her to "forget a lady's manners by being so verbal"; for she would rather he felt what she thinks of him "than make it her boast." But the shrewdest notes of him are from old Belarius when Cloten intrudes upon his mountain-home. Belarius has not seen him since he was a boy, but there is no mistaking him; in his case, at least, the man was bound to be just like the boy, only more so: discipline could do nothing for him:

> "Long is it since I saw him,
> But time hath nothing blurr'd those lines of favour
> Which then he wore; the snatches in his voice,
> And burst of speaking, were as his."
>
> "Being scarce made up,
> I mean, to man, he had not apprehension
> Of roaring terrors; for the act of judgment
> Is oft the cause of fear."
>
> "Though his humour
> Was nothing but mutation, — ay, and that
> From one bad thing to worse: not frenzy, not
> Absolute madness could so far have rav'd,
> To bring him here alone."

These sharp sentences touch the marrow of the subject.

Cloten, indeed, is a very notable instance of a man or a thing, with not merely a loose screw in the gearing, but with all the screws loose. He has often reminded me of Scott's description of Desborough in *Woodstock:* "His limbs seemed to act upon different and contradictory principles. They were not, as the play says, in a concatenation accordingly: the right hand moved as if it were on bad terms with the left, and the legs showed an inclination to foot it in different and opposite directions." Precisely so it is with

Cloten's mind. There are the materials of a man in him, but they are not made up: his whole being seems a mass of unhingement, disorder, and jumble, full of unaccountable jerks and spasms; the several parts of him being at incurable odds one with another, each having a will and a way of its own, so that no two of them can pull together. Hence the ludicrous unfitness of all that he does, and most that he speaks. He has indeed some gift of practical shrewdness, is not without flashes of strong and ready sense; yet even these, through his overweening self-importance of rank and place, only serve to invest him all the more with the air of a conceited, blustering, consequential blockhead. For instance, in the scene with the Ambassador, he says, referring to Julius Cæsar, "There is no more such Cæsars: other of them may have crooked noses; but to own such straight arms, none"; where the pith of his ungeared and loose-screwed genius goes right to the mark, though it goes off out of time. It is curious to observe how in this scene his vein of sententious remark has the effect to heighten the ridiculousness of his character, from the St.-Vitus'-dance of mind through which it comes sprawling out. Therewithal he is rude, coarse, boisterous, vain, insolent, ambitious, malignant. Thus rendered ludicrous by whatever is best in him, and frightful by whatever is not ludicrous; savage in feeling, awkward in person, absurd in manners, — a — sputtering jolt-head; — he is of course the last man that any lady of sense or sensibility could be brought to endure. His calling Imogen an "imperceiverant thing," for not appreciating his superiority to Posthumus in the qualities that invite a lady's respect and affection, aptly illustrates the refined irony with which the character is drawn.

Cloten was for a long time considered unnatural. But it is nowise unlikely that Shakespeare may have met with prototypes of him in his observation of English lordlings and squires. Miss Seward, in one of her letters, describes a military captain whom she once knew; from which it

seems that the character was not wholly obsolete in her time: "The unmeaning frown, the shuffling gait, the bustling insignificance, the fever-and-ague fits of valour, the froward techiness, the unprincipled malice, and, what is most curious, the occasional gleams of good sense amid the floating clouds of folly which generally darkened and confused the man's brain"; — in all this, says she, "I saw the portrait of Cloten was not out of nature." And Gervinus speaks of it as "a lasting type of the man of rank and privileges, who has grown up in nothingness, and been trained in self-conceit."

Iachimo is a sort of diluted Iago. And I am not sure but the Poet may have meant to intimate as much by the name; for *Iachimo* sounds to me like *Iago* with the intellectual hell-starch washed out. For we can hardly conceive of Iago's being penetrated by the moral beauty even of an Imogen. At the beginning of the play, Iachimo is in that condition where it may be justly said, —

> "The wise gods seal our eyes; make us
> Adore our errors; laugh at us, while we strut
> To our confusion."

Like others of his class, he prides himself upon those arts in which he has probably had but too much success. Yet his conduct proceeds not so much from positive depravity of heart as because, either from lack of opportunity, or else from stress of youthful impulse, his conversations have not been with good company: or, to speak with more exactness, his atheism of womanly truth and honour is because he really has not met with them, while, again, his not meeting with them is because his tastes have not led him where they were to be found. Of course such men delight in making others do that for which they may scorn and revile them: hence their instincts guide them to frailty, and frailty in turn stuffs them with an opinion of their own strength. For it scarce need be said that this sort of conceit commonly grows by feeding on such experiences as are to be

gained among those who dwell at or near the confines of virtue and shame.

Thus we find Iachimo at first in just that stage of moral sickness that he must be worse before he can be better. Accordingly his next step consists in adding lying to libertinism, black perfidy to sensual intrigue. And it is a noteworthy point, that he is all along doubtful of success: perhaps the hero's calmness of tone and bearing has planted this doubt in him: at all events, he manifestly apprehends failure, and so has an alternative ready in case he fail. So that his forging of proofs is deliberate and premeditated; he has been prepared for it from the start. In his present enterprise he gets a new experience. At the first sight of Imogen, he is struck with unaccustomed fear; his instincts are not at home there; and he exclaims, "Boldness, be my friend! arm me, audacity, from head to foot!" He soon has need of all the strength he can muster in that kind. He has much difficulty in making her understand his drift; but, the moment she is sure of his meaning, her whole soul kindles into an overpowering energy of indignant astonishment. For the first and only time she uses the language and the gesture of stern insulted majesty, and with one blow of her tongue shatters his armour of audacity all in pieces. That she manifestly had never so much as imagined the possibility of such an assault, puts a second assault utterly out of the question: the villain has no stomach to try that game further; dare not even think of it. But, though her lightning instantly burns up his sensual thoughts, still it does not quite disconcert his address; he has studied his alternative part too well for that.

We see the effect of this interview already working upon him in the bedchamber-scene, and in what he soliloquizes over the sleeping Princess. Low-minded libertine as he is, her presence at once charms and chastens him. There he has a second inspiration of truth and manhood, deeper than the first: his thoughts catch the delicacy and purity of their object; and he dare not utter a foul word even to himself.

His description of the sleeper would almost redeem him in our eyes, but that we know the grace of it comes not from him, but from her *through* him; and we regard it as something that must be divine indeed, not to be strangled in passing through such a medium. How thoroughly her sweetness chastises the gross devil in him, is piercingly indicated by his closing words:

> "Swift, swift, you dragons of the night, that dawning
> May bare the raven's eye! I lodge in fear;
> Though this a heavenly angel, Hell is here."

From this time forward, we feel morally certain that he never again tampers with a woman's honour. Our next news of him is in connection with the gentlemen of Italy, who "promise noble service under the conduct of bold Iachimo." What it is that draws him back to Britain to face the perils of war, appears when Posthumus, disguised as a peasant, encounters him in the battle, "vanquisheth and disarmeth him, and then leaves him":

> "The heaviness and guilt within my bosom
> Takes off my manhood: I've belied a lady,
> The Princess of this country, and the air on 't
> Revengingly enfeebles me; or could this carl,
> A very drudge of Nature's, have subdu'd me
> In my profession?"

Here we learn how, by the laws of moral reaction, the unaccustomed awe of virtue which Imogen struck into him has grasped him the more firmly, and kept working in him all the more powerfully, for the dreadful wrong he has done her. He does not recognize Posthumus; but an evil conscience attributes to his own sin what is really owing to the superior strength and skill of the conquering arm. And his inward history is told with still more emphasis in the last scene, when he discovers himself, and speaks of "that paragon for whom my heart drops blood, and my false spirits quail to remember."

Thus the character illustrates Shakespeare's peculiar science and learned dealing in the moral constitution of man.

In Iachimo's practice on the wager his disease reaches the extreme point, which, even because it is extreme, starts a process of moral revolution within him; setting him to a hard diet of remorse and repentance, and conducting him through these to renovation and health. It is, in short, one of those large over-doses of crime which sometimes have the effect of purging off men's criminality. For such is the cunning leech-craft of Nature: out of men's vices she can batch scorpions, to lash and sting them into virtue.

Those who think Shakespeare apt to postpone the rights of untitled manhood in favour of conventional aristocracy may be sent to school to Pisanio; who is, socially, the humblest person in the drama, yet his being is "all compact" of essential heroism. It is fairly questionable whether he has not as much of noble stuff in him, as much inward adornment and worth of character, as the hero himself. Nor does the Poet stint him of opportunity; but gives him an immediate partnership in the deepest interest of the play, and makes him share in the honour of the best characters, by his sympathy with them, and his self-sacrificing love and service to them. And, what is very strange, this is done with most effect in an instance where the man does not himself appear. For, as soon as Imogen understands Iachimo's proposal, the first thing she does is to call out, "What, ho, Pisanio!" as if she felt assured that this faithful guardian would instantly physic the devil out of the wretch who has thus dared to insult her; and she keeps on calling him, till the insult is withdrawn, and a satisfactory reason for it assigned.

With a fine instinct of rectitude, which pierces deeper perhaps than the keenest sagacity, Pisanio never misses the right, and never falters in his allegiance to it. His fidelity is tried to the utmost on all sides, but nothing so much as tempts him from it. After the Queen has plied him with offers of wealth and honours, he gives us his mind aside:

> "But when to my good lord I prove untrue,
> I'll choke myself: there's all I'll do for you."

When Cloten worries him from point to point with threats and bribes, at last, to save his own life, he counterfeits a make-believe of yielding, but only that he may send the poor wretch off on a fool's errand, and to reap a fool's reward. And if he becomes false to his master, it is only when and because he knows his master has become false to himself. The order from Posthumus to murder his mistress is the hardest trial of all; yet his resolution is instantly taken: "If it be so to do good service, never let me be counted serviceable." Imogen makes one mistake in regard to her husband: when her eyes have been stabbed with the "damn'd paper," her faith in him lapses into the heresy that "some jay of Italy, whose mother was her painting, hath betray'd him." But the sorrowing servant keeps his faith unshaken, and at once divines the true cause of the monstrous charge:

> "It cannot be but that my master is abus'd:
> Some villain, ay, and singular in his art,
> Hath done you both this cursèd injury."

The pressure of duty on this nobleman in livery always makes the path light before him. He does indeed get mystified at last; but this is because he no longer has any thing to do: in the lack of work, and of information whereon to act, he becomes perplexed; but still retains his confidence in the providential safety of the good, and soothes his anxieties with the reflection, "Fortune brings in some boats that are not steer'd." His whole course shows not one self-regarding purpose or thought: he alone seems to live and breathe purely for others. And what shrewdness, what forecast, what fertility of beneficence there is in him! His character is lifted into the highest region of poetry by his oblivion of self; and even those whom he serves derive much of their poetry from his disinterested and uncorruptible loyalty to them. For there is no stronger testimonial of worth than the free allegiance of such a manly soul.

I must add, that the best idea we get of Imogen at any one time is when Pisanio unconsciously describes her to herself:

> "You must forget to be a woman; change
> Command into obedience; fear and niceness —
> The handmaids of all women, or, more truly,
> Woman its pretty self — into a waggish courage;
> Ready in gibes, quick-answer'd, saucy, and
> As quarrellous as the weasel; nay, you must
> Forget that rarest treasure of your cheek,
> Exposing it (but, O, the harder heart!
> Alack, no remedy!) to the greedy touch
> Of common-kissing Titan; and forget
> Your laboursome and dainty trims, wherein
> You made great Juno angry."

In this delicious little bundle of poetry he gives both the obverse and the reverse of Imogen's character; yet neither of them sees it: for indeed her beauty so pervades his inner man, and circulates in his mental blood, that he cannot open his mouth to speak of woman but that she fills it.

The organization of the play evidently required that Posthumus should be kept mostly in the background; since, otherwise, he would have to stay beside Imogen; in which case he could not be cheated out of his faith in her, and so there would be no chance for the trial and proof of her constancy. Hence the necessity of putting so much respecting him into the mouths of the other persons; and certainly their tongues are rich enough in his praise. The first scene, which is in substance a prologue to the action, is chiefly devoted to this purpose. There we learn that the hero, sprung of truly heroic stock, was left an orphan from the time of his birth:

> "The King he takes the babe,
> Breeds him, and makes him of his bedchamber;
> Puts to him all the learnings that his time
> Could make him the receiver of; which he took,
> As we do air, fast as 'twas minister'd, and
> In 's spring became a harvest; liv'd in Court —

> Which rare it is to do — most prais'd, most lov'd;
> A sample to the youngest; to the more mature
> A glass that feated them; and to the graver
> A child that guided dotards."

Thus he has grown up the foster-brother and playfellow of the Princess; and their love, rooted in the innocence of childhood, and twining with all their childish thoughts and studies and pleasures, has ripened with their growth; and now appears a calm, deep, earnest thing, the settled habit of their souls, and not a recent visitation. And when he urges her and she consents to a secret marriage, this is done in no transport of passion, but in the soberness of deliberate judgment and wisdom, to protect her and in her the State against the intriguing malice of the Queen and the splurging violence and incapacity of her son. Nor does the act involve any undutifulness to the King; for they both know that he is not his own man, and that he would be foremost in approving the match, but for the spell that keeps him from himself: in a word, it is not paternal right, but novercal machination that they cross and thwart. And that we may rest assured that this is no self-deluding fancy of theirs, all are represented as secretly glad at what has been done, except those who have none but mean and selfish reason for impugning it. So that the marriage is really no breach of their characteristic faithfulness on either side. As for Imogen, she has weighed well both her father's rights and the counsels of reason, as she also has her own rights and the honour of the crown: she "chose an eagle, and did avoid a puttock." Her firm conscientiousness in the matter comes out decisively in what she says after bitter experience of the King's anger:

> "My dearest husband,
> I something fear my father's wrath; but nothing —
> Always reserv'd my holy duty — what
> His rage can do on me. You must be gone;
> And I shall here abide the hourly shot
> Of angry eyes; not comforted to live,
> But that there is this jewel in the world,
> That I may see again."

Such is the hero's form of character as expressed or inferred in the opening scenes. It was no easy thing to carry him through the part assigned him in the play, without discrediting the claims thus advanced. And the Poet clearly meant that Imogen's wisdom as approved in other things should stand to us a pledge of his worth; that "by her election should be truly read what kind of man he is." And not the least of Shakespeare's merits as an artist is the skill he has in making his characters so utter themselves as at the same time to mirror each other. In this instance, being forced to withdraw Posthumus from our immediate view, or else to set him before us in a somewhat unfavourable light, the best thing he could do was to give us a reflection of him from Imogen, and to reinforce her opinion by the free suffrage of other parties. And surely it were something bold in any man to wage his own judgment against hers in a matter of this kind; for, as Campbell says, "she hallows to the imagination every thing that loves her, and that she loves in return."

Still one is apt to suspect that the man's high credit with Imogen and others is partly owing to the presence of such a foil as Cloten. And the grounds of complaint against him are two: first, his entering into the wager and encouraging the trial of his wife; second, his bloody purpose of revenge and his scheme for effecting it.

In regard to the first, he meets the insinuating freebooter in the company of well-reputed friends and under the roof of his honourable host, where he is bound by the laws of good-breeding to presume him worthy, and to treat him with respect. Then it is a high point of honour with him not to tolerate such low-thoughted and light-hearted petulance in his presence. Womanhood is to him a sacred thing: the whole course of his life has been such as to inspire him with the most chivalrous delicacy towards the sex: for his mother's sake and his own, but, above all, for Imogen's, the blood stirs within him, to hear woman made the theme of profane and scurrilous talk: the stale slander

of libertine tongues his noble sensitiveness instinctively resents as the worst possible affront to himself. We have Iachimo's subsequent voucher for it, that during their conversation "he was as calm as virtue," guiding his words with discretion, as well as uttering them with spirit; and, withal, that "he was too good to be where ill men were, and was the best of all amongst the rar'st of good ones." It is to be noted further, that he shows no purpose of accepting the wager, till the villain most adroitly hints that his reluctance springs from some lurking doubt of the lady's firmness; his very religion being thus entrapped into an allowance of the trial. And he rests in perfect confidence that the result will not only vindicate the honour of the sex, but give him the right to call the man to account for his impudent and impious levity. The worst, then, we can say of him on this point is, that, like the noble Kent in *King Lear*, he "had more man than wit about him." But this, I opine, should rather augment our love than abate our respect.

I believe no one questions the sufficiency of Iachimo's proofs. The impartial Philario is convinced, and so are all the rest. And we have a shrewd approval of their judgment in what the Princess says on missing the bracelet from her arm: "I hope it be not gone to tell my lord that I kiss aught but him." Posthumus does not indeed suspect any lying and treachery in the business, and it would hardly be to his credit if he did. It is not in his nature nor in his principles to be any thing by halves. And his very fulness of confidence at first renders him the more liable to the reverse in the contingency that is to arrive: because he is perfectly sure that no proofs of success can be shown, therefore, when some such are shown, he falls the more readily into the opposite state. And this, undoubtedly, is in the right line of nature. For to shake the confidence of such a man in such a case, is to invert it all into distrust at once.

As to his rash and cruel scheme of revenge, what I have

to say here is, that the best thing any man can do is, not to sin; the next best, when he has sinned, to repent. And it will do us no hurt to consider that the crown of all heroism in man or woman is repentance, so it be of the right sort. Now Posthumus does repent, — repents most nobly and heroically; keeping his repentance entirely to himself, and never giving the least hint of it to any person, till he has an opportunity to show it by "doing works meet for repentance." For an ostentatious repentance is only a replacing of one bad thing by a worse. No sooner does our hero receive the counterfeit token of his order having been performed, than his memory begins to be panged for what he has done. Revenge gives way wholly to pity and remorse. He forgets the wrong he seems to have suffered, in the wrong he has done. Even granting the worst that he has been led to think, still he has no room but for grief that he did not leave the erring one a chance for the same "godly sorrow" with which his own heart is now exercised:

> "You married ones,
> If each of you should take this course, how many
> Must murder wives much better than themselves!"
>
> "Gods! if you
> Should have ta'en vengeance on my faults, I never
> Had liv'd to put on this: so had you sav'd
> The noble Imogen to repent; and struck
> Me, wretch more worth your vengeance."

Henceforth he only studies to burn into his soul the bitter remembrance of his own ill. And in this process personal and patriotic feelings work together. For the wrong he has done to Imogen is not all: he seems to have wronged his country still more, in putting out the light of its dearest hopes, "the expectancy and rose of the fair State." Weary of life, he enlists into the army levied against Britain. Once more upon his native soil, he will do what he can to make amends:

> "I am brought hither
> Among th' Italian gentry, and to fight
> Against my lady's kingdom: 'tis enough

> That, Britain, I have kill'd thy mistress ; peace !
> I'll give no wound to thee." — "I'll disrobe me
> Of these Italian weeds, and suit myself
> As does a Briton peasant : so I'll fight
> Against the part I come with ; so I'll die
> For thee, O Imogen ! even for whom my life
> Is, every breath, a death : and thus, unknown,
> Pitied nor hated, to the face of peril
> Myself I'll dedicate."

And how nobly the effect of all this inward discipline is pronounced at the close! Our hero has had enough of revenge: no more of that for him. He can easier pardon even Iachimo's crime than his own. And so, when the reformed rake sinks on his knee, and begs him, "Take that life which I so often owe"; he replies, —

> "Kneel not to me :
> The power that I have on you is to spare you ;
> The malice towards you to forgive you : live,
> And deal with others better."

Such is the liberal redemption with which the character of Posthumus is crowned in the latter part of the play. And if he, a Pagan, could so feel the sweetness of mercy, I think we Christians should not feel it less. — Posthumus is *secretly* noble; and that is nobleness indeed!

Imogen is the peer of Cordelia and Hermione and Perdita and Miranda; though at the same time as different from them all as any two of them are from each other. Other of Shakespeare's heroines are equal to her in the conception, but none of them is carried out with such sustained force and wealth of development: she is the circle and aggregate of eloquent womanhood, and we are given to see and feel all that she is. For, as Gervinus remarks, "she is, next to Hamlet, the most fully-drawn character of Shakespeare's poetry." Perhaps she does not touch the imagination quite so enchantingly as Miranda, nor the heart quite so deeply as Cordelia; but she goes near to make up the account by combining, as far as seems possible, the interest of both.

Already a wife when we first see her, Imogen acts but little in any other quality; yet in this one she approves herself the mistress of all womanly perfections, such as would make glad the heart and life of whoever stood in any relationship with her. That her attractions may appear the more as in herself, not in the feelings of others, that is, in her character, not in her sex, the latter is part of the time hidden from those about her: yet without any of the advantages that would arise from its being known what she is; disrobed of all the poetry and religion with which every right-minded man invests the presence of womanhood; still she kindles a deep, holy affection in every one that meets with her. Hazlitt, with much liveliness but more perversity of criticism, says, "Posthumus is only interesting from the interest she takes in him, and she is only interesting herself from her tenderness and constancy to her husband." If this be true, how is it that she so wins and wears the hearts of those who suspect not what she is? Why should wise and reverend manhood exclaim at sight of her, "Behold divineness no elder than a boy!" In truth, the "sweet, rosy lad," and the "page so kind, so duteous-diligent," is hardly less interesting, though in a different sort, than the lady, the princess, and the wife. But is it to us, and not to the other persons of the drama, that "she is only interesting from her tenderness and constancy to her husband"? Nay, much of the interest we take in her as a woman and a wife springs from the feelings kindled in others towards her as a sad, sweet, lovely boy. Indeed, so far from just is Hazlitt's remark, that there is no character in Shakespeare more apt to inspire one with the sentiment, —

> "What joy to hear thee, and to see!
> Thy elder brother I would be,
> Thy father, any thing to thee."

I have noted what it is that leads in the transpiration of Imogen's character. But, observe, hers is a fidelity not only of person to person, but of person to truth and right. Her moral delicacy shrinks from the least atom of untruth. This

is touchingly shown when Lucius finds her weeping upon the headless trunk of Cloten, which, being dressed in her husband's clothes, she mistakes for his: she gives *Richard du Champ* as the name of her slain master, and then says aside, "If I do lie, and do no harm by it, though the gods hear, I hope they'll pardon it." We have already seen how, in the case of Iachimo, her moral beauty "creates a soul under the ribs of death." The Queen, too, hard-faced tyrant as she is, and so skilled to "tickle where she wounds," cannot choose but soften towards her: "She's a lady so tender of rebukes, that words are strokes, and strokes death to her." Even to the dull Cloten, "from every one the best she hath, and she, of all compounded, outsells them all." And when she asks the Roman General to take her into his service as a page: "Ay, good youth; and rather father thee than master thee." To old Belarius, when he returns with his youthful companions, and finds her in the cave: "But that it eats our victuals, I should think here were a fairy." — "By Jupiter, an angel! or, if not, an earthly paragon!" And to the noble lads: "How angel-like he sings!" — "But his neat cookery! he cut our roots in characters, and sauc'd our broths, as Juno had been sick and he her dieter." — "Nobly he yokes a smiling with a sigh; as if the sigh was that it was for not being such a smile." And her father, when all are together, and their troubles over:

> "Posthumus anchors upon Imogen;
> And she, like harmless lightning, throws her eye
> On him, her brothers, me, her master, hitting
> Each object with a joy."

But it is needless to dwell upon, impossible to exhaust, the beauty of this delineation. The whole play is full of the divinest poetry, and it is nearly all inspired by the heroine, except what she herself utters and is.

Imogen has all the intelligence of Portia in *The Merchant of Venice*, without any of Portia's effort or art. Portia always tries to be wise, and always succeeds; Imogen succeeds at least as well without trying: and her wisdom is

better than Portia's inasmuch as, springing rather from nature than from reflection, it comes forth so freely that she never thinks of it herself. Then too her strength of intellect hides itself in delicacy; her variety and amplitude of mind in the exquisite grace and symmetry of all the parts. And how delightfully her mental action hovers in what may be called the border-land of instinct and consciousness, or of intuition and discourse! so that we are often at a loss whether it is she that speaks, or Nature that speaks through her. Clearness of understanding, depth and purity of feeling, simplicity and harmony of character, and the whole complexion made eloquent with perfect inward freshness and health, — such is this most Shakespearian structure of womanhood. Hence, while she always takes care that her thoughts and deeds be handsome and right, — hence the charming unconcernedness with which she leaves the event to take care of itself.

Imogen is as spirited, withal, as she is intelligent, whenever duty bids or permits her to be so. Her anger is hard indeed to arouse, but woe to the man that does arouse it. Notwithstanding her sharp trials and vexations, though pursued by cunning malice and "sprighted by a fool," the calm sweetness of her temper is ruffled but twice, and this is when duty to herself and her husband requires it. In both cases her anger is like a flash of lightning, brief, but sure. Not even Cloten's iron stomach is proof against her scorching strokes, when her spirit is up. And she is all the more beautiful that she knows how to be terrible.

Of her disguise we take no thought, because she takes none. In this behalf, however, the Poet is very careful of her, bringing her in contact with none but the honourable and holy Lucius, and the tender and reverential dwellers in the cave, where her modesty is in no peril from the familiarity of those who believe her to be what she seems; otherwise her sensitive feminine delicacy would be almost sure to discover her. But, as it is, she shows no fear and makes no effort, either, like Rosalind, lest she betray her sex to others.

or, like Viola, lest she wrong it to herself: all its proprieties are indeed preserved; yet she seems no more conscious of doing this than of the circulation of her blood. Her thoughts and feelings are intent on other matters; and such is her command of our sympathies, that for the time being she empties our minds of every thing but what is in her own. And it is much the same with her personal beauty: we never think of it at all save when others are speaking of it. And the reason seems to be, partly because she wears it so unconsciously herself, partly because, when she is before us, the radiance of her person is quenched in that of her mind and character; she so fills the inner eye, that what touches the outer is scarce heeded more than if it were not.

We can hardly say that Imogen is made any better by her trials and sufferings, for she seems just the same at the first as at the last. But hers is the far nobler part to suffer that others may be made better: for herself she seems to have needed no such discipline, but others needed that she should have it; and we have seen how her sufferings work the redemption of her principal wrongers. Need I add how divinely the Poet has woven into the texture of this delineation the profoundly Christian idea that the truly miserable person is not the sufferer but the doer of wrong?

In the two Princes the Poet again shows his preference of the innate to the acquired; if indeed one may venture to affirm what is due to nature, and what to art, in a place where have fallen the instructions of the veteran sage and hero whom they call father. From the lips of old Belarius they have drunk in the lore of wisdom and virtue: all their nobler aptitudes have been fed and nourished alike by the stories of his life and by the influences of their mountain-home. What they hear from him makes them desire to be like him when they are old; and this desire prompts them to go where he has been, see what he has seen, and do as he has done. So that all his arguments for keeping them withdrawn from the world are refuted by his own character;

they cannot rest away from the scenes where such treasures grow. He tells them,

> "The gates of monarchs
> Are arch'd so high, that giants may jet through,
> And keep their impious turbans on, without
> Good morrow to the Sun":

he warns them that this life

> "Is nobler than attending for a check;
> Prouder than rustling in unpaid-for silk":

he assures them that for twenty years

> "Here he has liv'd at honest freedom; paid
> More pious debts to Heaven than in all
> The fore-end of his time":

still they cannot but believe that the seed, which has ripened up into a wisdom so august and tender and sweet, was sown in him, as indeed it was, before he came there. The wealth of experience in him and the wealth of nature in them are both equally beautiful in their way, both equally becoming in their place; and if they have been to him the best of materials to work upon, he has also been to them the best of workmen. And yet the old man, glorious in his humility, imputes to their royal blood the high and heroic thoughts which his own great and childlike spirit has breathed into them:

> O thou goddess,
> Thou divine Nature, how thyself thou blazon'st
> In these two princely boys! They are as gentle
> As zephyrs, blowing below the violet,
> Not wagging his sweet head; and yet as rough,
> Their royal blood enchaf'd, as the rud'st wind,
> That by the top doth take the mountain pine,
> And make him stoop to th' vale. 'Tis wonderful
> That an invisible instinct should frame them
> To royalty unlearn'd; honour untaught;
> Civility not seen from other; valour,
> That wildly grows in them, but yields a crop
> As if it had been sow'd."

The Poet had no occasion to discriminate these young

gentlemen very sharply, still on close inspection we can see that they are by no means duplicates. The elder, Guiderius, is the stronger and manlier spirit of the two; Arviragus the more gentle and tender. Accordingly the former, when Cloten tries to frighten him with his empty bravado, answers, —

> "Those that I reverence, those I fear, the wise;
> At fools I laugh, not fear them."

So too in his sportive daring of consequences, after he has cut off the poor thing's head:

> "I'll throw 't into the creek
> Behind our rock; and let it to the sea,
> To tell the fishes he's the Queen's son, Cloten:
> That's all I reck."

On the other hand, Arviragus, in his grief at the seeming death of Imogen, loses himself in the pathetic legend of the Children dying in the wood, and the robins covering them with moss and flowers, till his brother chides him for "playing in wench-like words with that which is so serious."

But they both reflect with equal clearness the image of their teaching. Except themselves, truth, piety, gentleness, heroism, are the only inmates of their rocky dwelling. Love and reverence, the principles of whatsoever is greatest and best in human character, have sprung up in their breasts in healthy, happy proportion, and indissolubly wedded themselves to the simple and majestic forms of Nature around them. And how inexpressibly tender and sweet the pathos that mingles in their solemnities round the tomb of their gentle visitor, supposed to be dead! But, indeed, of these forest-scenes it is impossible to speak with any sort of justice. And we cannot tell whether the "holy witchcraft" of these scenes is owing more to the heroic veteran, the two princely boys, or the "fair youth" that has strayed amongst them,

> "A lovely apparition, sent
> To be a moment's ornament."

It is hardly too much to say, that whatever is most beauti-

ful elsewhere in the Poet is imaged here in happier beauty. And when the youthful dwellers in the mountain and the rock, awed and melted by the occasion, weep and warble over the grave of that "blessed thing" that seems to have dropped down from Heaven merely to win their love and vanish, one would think the scene must, as Schlegel says, "give to the most deadened imagination a new life for poetry."

OTHELLO, THE MOOR OF VENICE.

The Tragedy of Othello was entered at the Stationers' by Thomas Walkley, "under the hands of Sir George Buck and of the Wardens," in October, 1621, and was published in quarto the next year. It was also included in the folio collection of 1623, and was printed again in quarto in 1630. These three copies differ more or less among themselves: in particular, the folio has a number of passages, amounting in all to some hundred and sixty lines, that are wanting in the quarto of 1622. On the other hand, the latter has a few lines that are wanting in the folio; while the quarto of 1630 seems to have been made up from the other two. On the whole, the text has reached us in a pretty fair condition; though there are a few passages where the reading stands much in question, and gives little hope of being altogether cleared from doubt.

Until a recent date, this great drama was commonly supposed to have been among the latest of the Poet's writing. But, within the last fifty years, two alleged manuscript records have been produced which quite upset the old belief. One of these was given by Mr. Collier from "the Egerton Papers," showing the play to have been acted before Queen Elizabeth at Harefield, the seat of Lord-Keeper Egerton, in August, 1602. The other, purporting to be from "the Accounts of the Revels at Court," and produced

by Mr. Peter Cunningham, represents the piece to have been performed before the King at Whitehall in November, 1604. Both of these records, however, have since been set aside by the highest authority as forgeries. So that we are now thrown back upon the old ground, and are left without any external evidence as to the date of the writing; while the only piece of clear internal evidence is in Act iii., scene 4, where the Moor says to Desdemona, —

> "A liberal hand: the hearts of old gave hands;
> But our new heraldry is hands, not hearts."

The new order of the Baronetage was instituted by King James in 1611, and the figure of a bloody hand was among the armorial bearings of those who received the new title. The Poet's allusion can hardly have been to any thing else. And it is not a little remarkable that, even before the above-mentioned forgeries were exposed, Mr. White still held it certain that the forecited passage at least must have been written "after the creation of the first baronets."

Herewith agree all the other points of internal evidence. The workmanship abounds in marks of the Poet's latest style; the language, versification, cast of imagery, and psychologic grain, being such as to bespeak his highest maturity of power and art. So much is this the case, that Verplanck, writing while the account of performance at Harefield was still deemed authentic, thought the play must have been rewritten after that date, and perhaps made as different from what it was at first as the finished *Hamlet* was from the earliest copy. — I must add that we have one authentic contemporary notice of the play. Richard Burbadge, the great actor of that age, died in 1619; and a manuscript elegy written upon that occasion was discovered some years ago, which ascertains him to have acted the part of Othello. The writer gives a list of the principal characters in which Burbadge was distinguished, and winds up with the following:

"But let me not forget one chiefest part
Wherein, beyond the rest, he mov'd the heart, —
The grievèd Moor made jealous by a slave,
Who sent his wife to fill a timeless grave."

The tragedy was founded on one of Giraldi Cinthio's novels. Whether the story was accessible to Shakespeare in English is uncertain, no translation of so early a date having been discovered. But I have already observed more than once that we are not without indications of his having known enough of Italian to take the matter directly from the original. The Poet can hardly be said to have borrowed any thing more than a few incidents and the outline of the plot; the character, passion, pathos, and poetry being entirely his own. The following abstract of the tale will show the nature and extent of his obligations:

A Moorish captain, distinguished for his valour and conduct, was in the service of the Venetian Republic. While living at Venice, his noble qualities captivated the heart of a very beautiful and virtuous lady called Desdemona. He returned her love; and they were married, against the wishes of her friends. Some time after the marriage, he was appointed to the military command of Cyprus, and was accompanied thither by his wife. He had for his ensign a man of a pleasing person, but a very wicked heart. The ensign was also married, his wife being a discreet and handsome woman, who was much liked by Desdemona; and the two passed a good deal of their time together. Both of these went with the Moor to his command; as did also his lieutenant, a man to whom he was strongly attached, and who was highly esteemed by Desdemona for her husband's sake. The ensign became enamoured of Desdemona; but, on finding he could make no impression upon her, his passion soon turned to revenge: so he took it into his head that she was in love with the lieutenant, and determined to work the ruin of them both by accusing them to the Moor. The Moor was so strong in love for his wife, and in friendship for the lieutenant, that the villain knew he would have

to be very cunning and artful in his practice, else the mischief would recoil upon himself. After a while, the lieutenant wounded a soldier on guard, for which he was cashiered by the Moor; and the lady, grieved at her husband's losing so good a friend, went to pleading for his restoration. Thereupon the ensign began to work his craft, by insinuating to the Moor that her solicitations were for no good cause. On being required to speak more plainly, he directly accused her of preferring the lieutenant to her husband on account of the latter's complexion. The Moor then told him he ought to have his tongue cut out for thus attacking the lady's honour, and demanded ocular proof of his accusation. The ensign then began a course of downright lying, but still managed so craftily as to draw the other more and more into his toils, and finally engaged to furnish the proof required.

Now Desdemona often went to the ensign's house, and spent some time with his wife, taking with her a handkerchief which the Moor had given her, and which, being delicately embroidered in the Moorish style, was much prized by them both. The ensign had a little girl that Desdemona was very fond of; and one day, while she was caressing the child, he stole away the handkerchief so adroitly that she did not perceive the act. His next device was to leave the handkerchief on the lieutenant's bolster; where the latter soon found it, and, knowing it to be Desdemona's, went to return it to her. The Moor, hearing his knock, and going to the window, asked who was there; whereupon the lieutenant, fearing his anger, ran away without answering. The ensign was very glad of this incident, as it gave him more matter to work with; and he contrived one day to have an interview with the lieutenant in a place where the Moor could see them. In the course of their talk, which was on a different subject, he laughed much, and by his gestures made as if he were greatly surprised at the other's disclosures. The interview over, and the Moor asking what had passed between them, the ensign then,

after much feigning of reluctance, said the lieutenant had boasted of his frequent meetings with Desdemona, and how, the last time he was with her, she had given him the handkerchief. Shortly after, the Moor asked his wife for the handkerchief; and, as she could not find it, this strengthened his suspicions into conviction: still, before proceeding to extremities, he craved the further proof of seeing the handkerchief in the lieutenant's possession. So, while the lieutenant's mistress was sitting at the window of his house, and copying the embroidery, the ensign pointed her out to the Moor. The two then arrange for killing both the parties: the ensign sets upon the lieutenant in the night, and wounds him; but he fights manfully, and raises an alarm, which draws a crowd to the spot, the ensign himself appearing among them, as if roused by the cry. Upon hearing of this, the lady speaks her grief for the lieutenant; which so enrages the Moor, that he forthwith contrives her death. The ensign hides himself in a closet of her chamber; at the time appointed he makes a noise; Desdemona rises and goes to see what it is, and he then beats her to death with a stocking full of sand; the Moor meanwhile accusing her of the crime, and she protesting her innocence. This done, they pull down the ceiling upon her, and run out crying that the house is falling: people rush in, and find her dead under the beams, no one suspecting the truth of the matter. But the Moor soon becomes distracted with remorse. Hating the sight of the ensign, he degrades him, and drives him out of his company; whereupon the villain goes to plotting revenge upon him. He reveals to the lieutenant the truth about the lady's death, omitting his own share in it; the lieutenant accuses the Moor to the Senate, and calls in the ensign as his witness. The Moor is imprisoned, banished, and finally put to death by his wife's kindred. The ensign, returning to Venice, and continuing at his old practices, is taken up, put to the torture, and racked so violently, that he soon dies.

Such, in brief, are the leading incidents of the novel. Of

course the parts of Othello and Desdemona, Iago and Emilia, Cassio and Bianca, were suggested by what the Poet found in the tale. The novel has nothing answering to the part of Roderigo; nor did it furnish any of the names except *Desdemona*. Some of Iago's characteristic traits may be said to have been taken from the ensign: but this is about the whole of the Poet's obligation in the matter of character. The tale describes the Moor as valiant, prudent, and capable, Desdemona as virtuous and beautiful; and states that she loved the Moor for his nobleness of character, and that her family was much opposed to the match. These are all the hints which Shakespeare had towards the mighty delineations of character in this play, as distinguished from the incidents of the plot. For, as Mr. White remarks, "of the complex psychological structure of the various personages, and of their harmonious mental and moral action, there is not even a rudimentary hint in the story." It is to be observed, also, that Roderigo serves as a most effective occasion in the drama; Iago's most inward and idiomatic traits being made to transpire upon him; and this in such a way as to lift the characters of Othello and Desdemona into a much higher region, and invest them with a far deeper and more pathetic interest.

The island of Cyprus, where the scene of the drama is chiefly laid, became subject to the Republic of Venice, and was first garrisoned with Venetian troops, in 1471. After that time, the only attempt ever made upon that island by the Turks was under Selim the Second, in 1570. It was then invaded by a powerful force, and conquered in 1571; since which time it has continued a part of the Turkish Empire. The play represents that there was a junction of the Turkish fleet at Rhodes for the purpose of invading Cyprus; that the fleet started towards Cyprus, went back to Rhodes, there met another squadron, and then resumed its course to Cyprus. These are historical facts, and took place when Mustapha, Selim's general, attacked Cyprus,

in May, 1570; which is therefore the true period of the action.

In respect of general merit, *Othello* unquestionably stands in the same rank with the Poet's three other great tragedies, *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, and *King Lear*. As to its relative place among the four, the best judges, as might be expected, hold different views. In compass and reach of thought, it is certainly inferior to *Hamlet;* in the elements and impressions of moral terror, to *Macbeth;* in breadth and variety of characterization, to *King Lear:* but it has one advantage over the others, in that the passion, the action, the interest, all take their growth in the soil of domestic life; for which cause the play has a better hold on the common sympathies of mankind. It is indeed the greatest of domestic dramas. And I am apt to think it the *best-organized* of all Shakespeare's plays; though perhaps *Macbeth* may stand as its equal in that respect. As a piece of dramatic architecture, *Othello* seems to me so nearly perfect, that I do not care to entertain any thought of how it might be better. On the whole, perhaps it may be safely affirmed of the four tragedies in question, that the most competent readers will always like that best which they read last. For my own part, I acknowledge a slight preference for *King Lear;* but I find it not easy to keep up such preference while either of the others is fresher in my thoughts.

Dr. Johnson winds up his excellent remarks on *Othello* thus: "Had the scene opened in Cyprus, and the preceding incidents been occasionally related, there had been little wanting to a drama of the most exact and scrupulous regularity." Of course the meaning here is, that the play would have been the better for such a change. On the plan thus proposed, the whole of the first Act must needs have been withheld, except so much of it as might be cast into the narrative form. That Act is eminently rich in character, in life, in every thing indeed for which the dra-

matic form is most desirable. What narration could supply the place, for instance, of Othello's address to the Senate? Or, those early outcroppings of Iago's wickedness, how could they have been turned into narrative without defeating the proper spirit and impression of them? Any attempt, indeed, to produce the best parts of that Act in the narrative form would have made the drama even more irregular than it is now. For in that case the irregularity would have been in the very substance of the work. And what is mere regularity of form good for, that it should be purchased at such a cost?

But I have still deeper reasons for preferring the play as it is. The first Act is, I think, strictly fundamental to the others, as it ought to be, and hence necessary to a right understanding of them. It may be observed generally, indeed, that the Poet displays excellent judgment in his opening scenes. Nor have we any better instance of this than in the case of *Othello;* which begins at the beginning, and goes regularly forward, instead of beginning in the middle, as Dr. Johnson would have it, and then going both ways. In the first Act we have a perfect seminary of the whole representation; the prolific germs, so to speak, out which the entire work is evolved. From the matter of the opening scenes we gain just such a forecast or preconception of the characters as is needful in order to make their after-course thoroughly intelligible. And the not duly attending to what is there disclosed has caused a good deal of false criticism on the play. This is especially true in the case of Iago, who, from inattention to his earlier developments, has been supposed to act from revenge; and then, as no adequate motives for such revenge could be found, the character has been thought unnatural. I undertake to say, indeed, that neither Iago nor Othello can be rightly interpreted at all, without very special reference to what is unfolded of them in the first Act. For there it is that we are to look for the first principles or seminal ideas of those characters.

We often speak of men as acting thus or thus, according as they are influenced from without. And in one sense this is true; yet not so but that the man rather determines the motive than the motive the man. For the same influences often move men quite variously, according to their several predispositions. What is with one a motive to virtue, is with another a motive to vice, and with a third no motive at all. On the other hand, where the outward actions are the same, the inward springs are often very different. So that we cannot truly understand a man, unless we first have some insight of his actuating principle, which may serve as a key, or as a clew, to his external behaviour. In brief, as a man's actions are the proper index of his character, so his character is the light whereby that index is to be read. And so, in the case of Othello, we must first have some insight of his character, and of the characters that act upon him, before we can rightly judge whether the mainspring of his action be jealousy or something else. So too in the case of Iago; that he has no external provocation to the part he acts, does not necessarily make him unnatural; for he may have an innate passion for mischief so strong as to supersede all such provocation.

The main passions and proceedings of the drama take their start from Iago. And the first Act amply discloses what he is made of and moved by. From what he there does, it is plain enough that his actuating principle lies not in revenge, but in a certain original malignity of nature. As if on purpose to prevent any mistake as to his springs of action, he is set forth in various aspects having no direct bearing on the main course of the play. He comes before us exercising his faculties on the dupe Roderigo, and thereby spilling out the secret of his habitual motives and impulses.

We know, from the first, that the bond of union between them is the purse. Roderigo thinks he is buying up Iago's talents and services. This is just what Iago means to have

him think. Here we have, on the one side, pride of purse; on the other, pride of intellect. It is even doubtful which glories most, the dupe in having money to bribe talents, or the villain in having wit to catch money. Still it is plain enough that Iago, with a pride of intellectual mastery far stronger than his love of lucre, cares less for the money than for the fun of wheedling and swindling others out of it.

To trace through in detail the course and method of Iago's proceedings with Roderigo; to note, step by step, how he works and winds and governs him to his purpose; would use up too much space. Wonderful indeed are the arts whereby the rogue wins and maintains his ascendency over the gull. During some parts of their conversation, we can almost see the former worming himself into the latter, like a corkscrew into a cork. And the sagacity with which Iago feels and forescents his way into Roderigo is only equalled by the skill with which, while clinching the nail of one conquest, he prepares the subject, by a sort of fore-reaching process, for a further conquest.

A single item of his practice in this behalf is all I can stay to notice. The hardest part of his scheme on Roderigo is to engage him in a criminal quest of Desdemona. For the passion with which she has inspired him is hardly consistent with any purpose of dishonouring her. At first, he hopes her father will break off the match with Othello, so that she may still be open to an honest solicitation; but when he finds her married, and the marriage allowed by her father, he is for giving up in despair. But Iago again besets him like an evil angel, and plies his witchcraft with augmented vigour. Himself an utter atheist of female virtue, his cue is to debauch Roderigo with his own atheism. He therefore at the same time flatters his pride by urging the power of money, and inflames his passion by urging the frailty of woman; as knowing that the greatest preventive of dishonourable passion is faith in the virtue of its object. Throughout this undertaking, Iago's passionless soul revels amid lewd thoughts and images, like a spirit broke loose

from the pit. With his nimble fancy, his facility and felicity of combination, fertile, fluent, and apposite in plausibilities, he literally overwhelms the poor fellow's power of resistance. I refer to the dialogue where, finding the man's wits too thick for much argument, he keeps iterating the phrase, "put money in thy purse," and thus fairly beats down his defences by mere emphasis and stress. The issue proves that he knew his man perfectly. Nor can any thing surpass the fiendish chuckle of self-satisfaction with which he turns from his conquest to sneer at the victim:

> "Thus do I ever make my fool my purse:
> For I mine own gain'd knowledge should profane,
> If I would time expend with such a snipe,
> But for my sport and profit."

Roderigo, if not preoccupied with vices, is at least empty of virtues; so that Iago has but to work upon his unfortified posts, and ruin him through these. But the Moor has no such openings: the villain can reach him only through his virtues; has no way to crush him but by turning his honour and integrity against him. Knowing his "perfect soul," he dare not make to him the least tender of dishonourable services, as such an act would be sure to kindle his resentment. To him, therefore, he uses the closest craft, the artfullest simulation. Still he takes shrewd care not to whiten the sepulchre so much as to provoke a scrutiny of its contents; not boasting of his moral scruples at all, but rather modestly confessing them; as though, being a soldier, he feared that such things might speak more for his virtue than his manhood.

I must notice a few particulars of his practice on Othello. And I may as well begin by remarking how, to the end that his accusation of others may stand clear of distrust, he prefaces it by accusing himself. Thus he affects to disqualify his own judgment touching the matter he has on foot:

> "I confess, it is my nature's plague
> To spy into abuses, and oft my jealousy
> Shapes faults that are not."

Here he of course designs the contrary impression; as, in actual life, men sometimes acknowledge real vices, in order to be acquitted of them. Acting, too, as if he spared no pains to be right, yet still feared he was wrong, his very opinions carry the weight of facts, as having forced themselves upon him against his will. When, watching his occasion, he proceeds to set the scheme of mischief at work, his mind seems struggling with some terrible secret which he dare not let out, yet cannot keep in; which breaks from him in spite of himself, and even because of his fear to utter it. He thus manages to be heard, and still to seem overheard; that so he may not be held responsible for his words, any more than if he had spoken in his sleep. And there is, withal, a dark, frightful significance in his manner, which puts the hearer in an agony of curiosity. All this will appear by a brief extract from the dialogue which follows close upon Desdemona's first urging of her suit in Cassio's behalf:

"*Iago.* Did Michael Cassio, when you woo'd my lady,
Know of your love?
Othel. He did, from first to last: why dost thou ask?
Iago. But for the satisfaction of my thought;
No further harm.
Othel. Why of thy thought, Iago?
Iago. I did not think he had been acquainted with her.
Othel. O, yes; and went between us very oft.
Iago. Indeed!
Othel. Indeed! ay, indeed: discern'st thou aught in that?
Is he not honest?
Iago. Honest, my lord?
Othel. Honest! ay, honest.
Iago. My lord, for aught I know.
Othel. What dost thou think?
Iago. Think, my lord?
Othel. Think, my lord! By Heaven, thou echo'st me,
As if there were some monster in thy thought
Too hideous to be shown. Thou dost mean something:
I heard thee say but now, thou lik'dst not that,
When Cassio left my wife: what didst not like?
And, when I told thee he was of my counsel

In my whole course of wooing, thou criedst *Indeed!*
And didst contract and purse thy brow together,
As if thou then hadst shut up in thy brain
Some horrible conceit. If thou dost love me,
Show me thy thought.
Iago. My lord, you know I love you.
Othel. I think thou dost;
And — for I know thou'rt full of love and honesty,
And weigh'st thy words before thou giv'st them breath –
Therefore these stops of thine fright me the more:
For such things in a false disloyal knave
Are tricks of custom; but in a man that's just
They're close delations, working from the heart,
That passion cannot rule."

In this, and in much of what follows, the more Iago refuses to tell his thoughts, the more he sharpens the desire of knowing them: when questioned, he so states his reasons for not speaking, as, in effect, to compel the Moor to extort the secret from him. For instance, in those well-known lines, —

"Good name in man and woman, dear my lord,
Is the immediate jewel of their souls:
Who steals my purse steals trash; 'tis something, nothing;
'Twas mine, 'tis his, and has been slave to thousands;
But he that filches from me my good name,
Robs me of that which not-enriches him,
And makes me poor indeed";—

in these lines, he of course means to have it understood that nothing but tenderness of others restrains him from uttering what would blast them. Thus he kindles the intensest craving to know what the dreadful truth is that so ties up his tongue. For his purpose is, not only to deceive Othello, but to get his thanks for deceiving him:

"I'll have our Michael Cassio on the hip;
Abuse him to the Moor in the rank garb;
Make the Moor thank me, love me, and reward me,
For making him egregiously an ass,
And practising upon his peace and quiet
Even to madness."

Here we have a pungent spurt of that essential malignity

which causes Iago to gloat over the agonies he inflicts. As a stronger instance of the same thing, take the passage where he indulges his terrible energy of expression directly on the Moor, and quietly sucks in the pleasure of seeing him writhe under it:

> "*Iago.* O, beware, my lord, of jealousy!
> It is the green-ey'd monster, which doth make
> The meat it feeds on: that husband lives in bliss
> Who, certain of his fate, loves not his wronger;
> But, O, what damnèd minutes tells he o'er
> Who dotes, yet doubts; suspects, yet strongly loves!
> *Othel.* O misery!
> *Iago.* Poor and content is rich, and rich enough;
> But riches fineless is as poor as Winter
> To him that ever fears he shall be poor.
> Good Heaven, the souls of all my tribe defend
> From jealousy!"

In this piece of virulent eloquence Iago's fiendish heart is grimly sporting itself at the torments which his speech stings into the Moor.

In further illustration of this character, I may observe that the healthy, natural mind is marked by openness to impressions and inspirations from without, so that the social, moral, and religious sentiments give law to the inner man. But our ancient despises all this. His creed is, that the yielding to any inspirations from without argues an ignoble want of mental force. The religions of our nature, as love, honour, reverence, fidelity, loyalty, domestic awe, all such, according to this liberal and learned spirit, are but "a lust of the blood, and a permission of the will." He scoffs at them. Hence, when walking amidst the better growths of humanity, he is "nothing, if not critical." So he pulls up every flower, however beautiful, to find a flaw in the root, and of course flaws the root in pulling it. His mind indeed is utterly unimpressible, receives nothing, yields to nothing, but cuts its way everywhere like a flint. This is well shown in his first interview with Desdemona. He goes to scorching the women, one after another, with

his caustic satire. To stop off his flow of scoffing wit, she asks him, "But what praise couldst thou bestow on a deserving woman indeed?" whereupon we have this:

> "*Iago.* She that was ever fair, and never proud;
> Had tongue at will, and yet was never loud;
> Never lack'd gold, and yet went never gay;
> Fled from her wish, and yet said, *now I may;*
> She that, being anger'd, her revenge being nigh,
> Bade her wrong stay, and her displeasure fly;
> She that could think, and ne'er disclose her mind;
> See suitors following, and not look behind;
> She was a wight, if ever such wight were, —
> *Desde.* To do what?
> *Iago.* To suckle fools and chronicle small beer."

We have another characteristic outcome of like sort in the brief dialogue which he holds with Cassio about the heroine, just before he beguiles that noble-souled piece of infirmity into the drunken brawl which causes him to be cashiered:

> "*Cassio.* Welcome, Iago; we must to the watch.
> *Iago.* Not this hour, lieutenant; 'tis not ten o'clock. Our general cast us thus early for the love of his Desdemona, whom let us not therefore blame.
> *Cassio.* She's a most exquisite lady.
> *Iago.* And, I'll warrant her, full of game.
> *Cassio.* Indeed, she's a most fresh and delicate creature.
> *Iago.* What an eye she has! methinks it sounds a parley of provocation.
> *Cassio.* An inviting eye; and yet, methinks, right modest.
> *Iago.* And when she speaks, is it not an alarum to love?
> *Cassio.* She is, indeed, perfection."

In these few short speeches of Iago is disclosed the inmost soul of a cold intellectual sensualist, his faculties dancing and capering amidst the provocatives of passion, because himself without passion. Senseless or reckless of every thing good, but keenly alive to whatsoever he can turn to a bad use, his mind acts like a sieve, to strain out all the wine, and retain only the lees of womanhood; which lees he delights to hold up as the main ingredients of the sex. And Cassio's very delicacy and religiousness of thought

prevent his taking offence at the villain's heartless and profane levity. Iago then goes on to suit himself to all the demands of the frankest joviality. As he is without any feelings, so he can feign them all indifferently to work out his design; casting himself into the boon companion and the singer of pothouse songs with the same facility as into the dark contriver of hellish plots.

I have spoken of the secret delight Iago takes in so framing his speech of seeming friendship to the Moor as to make it rasp and corrode where it touches. The same wantonness of malignant sport appears in his talk to Cassio when the latter is smarting with the sense of having been cashiered for drunkenness. He there uses a style of concealed irony, as being the aptest way to sting his friend; taking for granted that he has no sensibilities of honour to be hurt by what has happened. The dialogue, though richly characteristic of both the speakers, is too long for quotation here. But it would hardly do to omit the soliloquy which closes the scene. Iago persuades the amiable and self-accusing lieutenant to engage Desdemona as his advocate to the Moor, and then, being left alone, communes with himself as follows:

> "And what's he, then, that says I play the villain?
> When this advice is free I give and honest,
> Probal to thinking, and indeed the course
> To win the Moor again. For 'tis most easy
> Th' inclining Desdemona to subdue
> In any honest suit: she's fram'd as fruitful
> As the free elements. And then for her
> To win the Moor, — were 't to renounce his baptism,
> All seals and symbols of redeemèd sin, —
> His soul is so enfetter'd to her love,
> That she may make, unmake, do what she list,
> Even as her appetite shall play the god
> With his weak function. How am I, then, a villain
> To counsel Cassio to this parallel course,
> Directly to his good? Divinity of Hell!
> When devils will their blackest sins put on,
> They do suggest at first with heavenly shows,

As I do now : for while this honest fool
Plies Desdemona to repair his fortunes,
And she for him pleads strongly to the Moor,
I'll pour this pestilence into his ear, —
That she repeals him for her body's lust ;
And, by how much she strives to do him good,
She shall undo her credit with the Moor :
So will I turn her virtue into pitch ;
And out of her own goodness make the net
That shall enmesh them all."

By way of finishing this part of the theme, I will refer to a highly significant point which Mr. Verplanck was the first to notice. In one of his speeches to the gull, Iago says, "I have looked upon the world for *four times seven years;* and, since I could distinguish betwixt a benefit and an injury, I never found a man that knew how to love himself." This ascertains his age to be twenty-eight years; though we are apt to think of him as a much older man. The Poet, no doubt, had a wise purpose in making him so young. It marks him out as having an instinctive faculty and aptitude for diabolical machination; it infers his virulence of mind to be something innate, and not superinduced at all by harsh and bitter usage: in brief, it tells us that his expertness in what he calls the "divinity of Hell" is an original gift, and springs from his having a genius for that kind of thing, insomuch that but little practice was needed to perfect him in it. Moreover his youth goes far to explain the trust which others repose in him: they cannot suspect one so young of being either skilled in villainous craft or soured by hard experience of the world; while his polished manners and winning address gain him the credit of superior parts, without breeding any question of his truth. "In a young man," says Verplanck, "the hypocrisy, the knowledge, the dexterous management of the worst and weakest parts of human nature, the recklessness of moral feeling; even the stern, bitter wit, intellectual and contemptuous, without any of the gayety of youth; are all precocious and

peculiar, separating Iago from the ordinary sympathies of our nature, and investing him with higher talent and blacker guilt."

It appears, then, that intellectuality is Iago's proper character; that is, the intellect has in him cast off all allegiance to the moral reason, and become a law unto itself; so that the mere fact of his being able to do a thing is sufficient cause for doing it. For, in such a case, the man naturally comes to act, not for any outward ends or objects, but merely for the sake of acting. We thus have a cold, dry pruriency of mind, or a lust of the brain, which issues in a fanaticism of mischief, a sort of hungering and thirsting after unrighteousness. Accordingly Iago shows no addiction to sensualities: his passions are concentrated in the head; his desires are of the Satanical order; so that he scorns the lusts of the flesh; or, if indulging them at all, he prefers to do it in a criminal way, as finding more pleasure in the criminality than in any thing else. For such, I take it, is the motive-principle of Satan. Iago seems indeed more fiendish than Milton's Satan: for when the latter first sees Adam and Eve together in Paradise he relents at the prospect of ruining the happiness before him, and prefaces the act with a gush of pity for the victims; whereas Iago, on witnessing the raptures of Othello and Desdemona at their first meeting after the sea-voyage, mutters to himself, as in a transport of jubilant ferocity, —

> "O, you are well-tun'd now!
> But I'll set down the pegs that make this music,
> As honest as I am."

Edmund, the villain of *King Lear*, does not so much make war on Duty as shift her off out of the way to make room for his wit: seeing the road clear but for moral restraints, he politely bows them out of door, that so his faculties may work with entire freedom. Iago differs from him in this respect: positive invasions of Duty are a sport and pastime to him; he even goes out of his way to spit in her face and walk over her. That a thing ought not to be done is with

him a special motive for doing it, because, the worse the deed, the more it shows his freedom and power. Hence, in one of his soliloquies, where he speaks of loving Desdemona, he first disclaims any unlawful passion for her, and then adds, parenthetically, "though, peradventure, I stand accountant for as great a sin": as much as to say, that whether guilty or not he did not care, and dared the responsibility at all events. The late Mr. Booth, in pronouncing these words, would cast his eyes upwards as if looking Heaven in the face with a sort of defiant smile; thus representing Iago as acknowledging his Maker only to brave Him!

That Iago prefers lying to telling the truth is implied in what I have been saying. Such a preference seems indeed to be a necessary consequence of his lawlessness of intellect. For it is a mistake to suppose a man's love of truth will needs be in proportion to his intellectuality: such inordinateness of mind may even find its chief delight in making lies, because what it most craves is room for activity and display. And so Iago's characteristic satisfaction seems to stand in a practical reversing of moral distinctions; for instance, in causing his falsehood to do the work of truth, or another's truth the work of falsehood. For, to make virtue pass for virtue, and pitch for pitch, is no triumph at all; but to make the one pass for the other, is a triumph indeed! Iago glories in thus seeming to convict things of untruth; in compelling Nature, as it were, to acknowledge him too much for her. Hence his adroit practice to appear as if serving Roderigo while really using him. Hence his purpose, not merely to deceive the Moor, but to get his thanks for doing so. Therefore it is that he takes such a malicious pleasure in turning Desdemona's conduct wrong side out; for, the more angel she, the greater his triumph in making her seem a devil.

But I cannot sound the depth of Iago's cunning: in attempting to thread his intricacies, my mind gets bewildered. Sleepless, unrelenting, inexhaustible, with an energy that

never flags, and an alertness that nothing can surprise, he outwits every obstacle, and turns it into a help. By the working of his devilish arts, the Moor is brought to distrust all his own original perceptions, to renounce his own understanding, and to see every thing just as Iago would have him see it. And such, in fact, is the villain's aim, the very earnest and pledge of his intellectual mastery.

We can indeed scarce conceive any wickedness into which such a lust and pride of intellect and will may not carry a man. Craving for action of the most exciting kind, there is a fascination for Iago in the very danger of crime. Walking the plain, safe, straightforward path of truth and right, does not excite and occupy him enough: he prefers to thread the dark, perilous intricacies of some hellish plot, or to balance himself, as it were, on a rope stretched over an abyss, where danger stimulates, and success demonstrates, his agility. He has, in short, an insatiable itching of mind, which finds relief in roughing it through the briers and thickets of diabolical undertakings. Or, to vary the figure once more, it is as if one should be so taken with a passion for dancing over eggs as to make an open floor seem vapid and dull. Even if remorse overtake such a man, its effect is to urge him deeper into crime; as the desperate gamester naturally tries to bury his chagrin at past losses in the increased excitement of a larger stake. For even so remorse, without repentance, serves but to augment the guilt from which it springs.

Critics have puzzled themselves a good deal about Iago's motives. The truth is, "natures such as his spin motives out of their own bowels." In Wordsworth's play of *The Borderers*, I find one of the characters described in a manner that fits our ancient rarely well:

> "There needs no other motive
> Than that most strange incontinence in crime
> Which haunts this Oswald. Power is life to him,
> And breath and being; where he cannot govern,
> He will destroy."

If it be objected to this view, that Iago states his motives to Roderigo; I answer, Iago is a liar, and is trying to dupe Roderigo; and he knows he must allege some motives, else his work will not speed. Or, if it be objected that he states them in soliloquy, when there is no one present for him to deceive; again I answer, Yes, there is; the very one he cares most to deceive, namely, himself. And indeed the terms of that statement clearly denote a foregone conclusion, the motives coming in only as an after-thought. He cannot quite look his purpose in the face; it is a little too fiendish for his steady gaze; and he tries to hunt up some motives to appease his qualms of conscience. This is what Coleridge justly calls "the motive-hunting of a motiveless malignity"; and well may he add, "how awful it is!"

Much has been said about Iago's acting from revenge. But he has no cause for revenge, unless to deserve his love be such a cause. It is true, he tries to suspect, first the Moor, and then Cassio, of having wronged him: he even finds, or feigns, a certain rumour to that effect; yet shows, by his manner of talking about it, that he does not himself believe it, or rather does not care whether it be true or not. And in the soliloquy which I have quoted, he owns that the reasons he alleges are but pretences, after all. He even boasts of the intention to entrap his victims through their friendship for him; as if his obligations to them were his only provocations against them. For, to bad men, obligations sometimes are provocations. The only wrong they have done him, or that he thinks they have done him, is the fact of their having the virtues and honours that move his envy. This, I take it, is the thought that "like a poisonous mineral gnaws his inwards." In other words, they are nobler and happier than he is, and for this he plots to be revenged by working their ruin through the very gifts for which he envies them. Meanwhile he amuses his reasoning powers by inventing a sort of *ex-post-facto* motives for his purpose, the same wicked busy-mindedness that suggests the crime prompting him to play with the possible reasons for it.

Cassio, all radiant as he is of truth and honour, makes a superb contrast to Iago. His nature is, I am apt to think, the finest-grained and most delicately organized of all Shakespeare's men. He is full-souled and frank-hearted, open, unsuspecting, and free; so guileless indeed, and so generous withal, that Iago can get no foul suggestion to stick upon him; every thing of the sort just runs right off from his mind, leaving it as clean and sweet as ever. He cannot indeed resist the cup that brims and sparkles with good-fellowship; he is too polite, too manly for that; and his delicacy of organization renders him almost as incapable of wine as a child; it takes hardly more than a thimbleful to overthrow him; and his head, his heart, all his organs and senses, are intoxicated at once. But the same thing that makes him so sensitive to wine makes him equally sensitive to the noblest and divinest inspirations of manhood. His sentiments towards Desdemona amount to a sort of religion; no impure thought or image is allowed to mingle in his contemplation of her; the reverent admiration, the purity and warmth of enthusiasm, with which he thinks and speaks of her, are all but angelic: in brief, his whole mind stands dressed towards her in the very ideal of human respect. I must quote a short passage by way of showing how choicely she has inspired him, and how his manliness blooms into poetry when she is his theme. The matter occurs at the time of her landing in Cyprus, whither Cassio had gone before:

> "*Mont.* But, good lieutenant, is your general wiv'd?
> *Cas.* Most fortunately: he hath achiev'd a maid
> That paragons description and wild fame;
> One that excels the quirks of blazoning pens,
> And in th' essential vesture of creation
> Does bear all excellency. — How now! who has put in?
> *Gent.* 'Tis one Iago, ancient to the general.
> *Cas.* He's had most favourable and happy speed:
> Tempests themselves, high seas, and howling winds,
> The gutter'd rocks, and congregated sands,
> As having sense of beauty, do omit

Their mortal natures, letting go safely by
The divine Desdemona.
Mont. Who is she?
Cas. She that I spake of, our great captain's captain,
Left in the conduct of the bold Iago;
Whose footing here anticipates our thoughts,
A se'nnight's speed.— Great Jove, Othello guard,
And swell his sail with thine own powerful breath;
That he may bless this bay with his tall ship,
Give renew'd fire to our extincted spirits,
And bring all Cyprus comfort! — O, behold,
The riches of the ship is come on shore!
Ye men of Cyprus, let her have your knees. —
Hail to thee, lady! and the grace of Heaven,
Before, behind thee, and on every hand,
Enwheel thee round!"

Coleridge justly notes it as an exquisite circumstance, that while Cassio, in his modest awe of the heroine's purity, thus gives her his knee, he makes no scruple of giving his lips to Emilia; though he does it in the presence of her husband, at the same time politely craving his allowance of the freedom. The truth is, he so much honours Desdemona, that he can scarce help kissing some one of her sex. In fine, the state of his mind towards Desdemona is such, that he feels safer and happier to live in the same town with her; to walk the same streets that she walks in; to kneel in the same church where she is kneeling; and the sense of having her for his friend puts peace into his pillow, and truth into his breast, makes the night calmer, the day cheerfuller, the air softer and balmier about him. On the other hand, he is to her "valiant Cassio," and "thrice-gentle Cassio"; terms of address in which she but indicates a delicate and honourable regard of his manly virtues.

It has been the custom to regard Othello as specially illustrating the effects of jealousy. What force this passion has with him, may be a question; but I am sure he has no special predisposition to it, and that in his case it does not grow in such a way, nor from such causes, as to be properly

characteristic of him; though such has been the view more commonly held. On this point there has been a strange ignoring of the inscrutable practices in which his passion originates. Instead of taking its grounds of judgment directly from the man himself, criticism has trusted too much in what is said of him by other persons of the drama; to whom he must perforce seem jealous, because they know nothing of the devilish cunning that has been at work upon him. And the common opinion has been a good deal furthered by the stage; Iago's villainy being made so open and barefaced, that the Moor must have been grossly jealous, or grossly stupid, not to see through him: whereas, in fact, so subtle is the villain's craft, so close and involved are his designs, that Othello deserves the more respect for being taken in by him.

Coleridge is very bold and clear in the Moor's defence. "Othello," says he, "does not kill Desdemona in jealousy, but in a conviction forced upon him by the almost superhuman art of Iago; such a conviction as any man would and must have entertained, who had believed Iago's honesty as Othello did. We, the audience, know that Iago is a villain from the beginning; but, in considering the essence of the Shakespearian Othello, we must perseveringly place ourselves in his situation, and under his circumstances. Then we shall immediately feel the fundamental difference between the solemn agony of the noble Moor and the wretched fishing jealousy of Leontes." And the account given of jealousy in this play would seem to acquit the Moor of having acted from that passion. Iago rightly describes it as "a monster that doth make the meat it feeds on." And Emilia speaks to the same sense, when Desdemona pleads that she never gave her husband cause of jealousy:

> "But jealous souls will not be answer'd so;
> They are not ever jealous for the cause,
> But jealous for they're jealous."

A passion thus self-generated and self-nourished ought

not to be confounded with a state of mind superinduced, like Othello's, by forgery of external proofs; a forgery wherein himself has no share but as the victim. He discovers no peculiar aptitude for such a passion: it is rather against the grain of his nature. Iago evidently knows this; knows that the Moor must see before he'll doubt; that when he doubts he'll prove; and that when he has proved, he will retain his honour at all events, and retain his love, if it be compatible with honour. Accordingly he pointedly warns the Moor to beware of jealousy, lest, from fear of being jealous, he should intrench himself in the opposite extreme, so as to be proof against conviction.

The struggle, then, in Othello is not between love and jealousy, but between love and honour. And Iago's proceedings are exactly adapted to bring these two latter passions into collision. It is indeed the Moor's freedom from a jealous temper that enables the villain to get the mastery of him. Such a nature as his, so open, so generous, so confiding, is just the one to be taken in Iago's strong toils: to have escaped them would have argued him a partaker of the strategy under which he falls. It is both the law and the impulse of a high and delicate honour to rely on another's word, unless we have proof to the contrary; to presume that things and persons are what they seem; and it is an attainture of ourselves to suspect falsehood in one who bears a character for truth. Such is precisely the Moor's condition in respect of Iago; a man whom he has long known, and never caught in a lie; whom he has often trusted, and never seen cause to regret it. So that in our judgment of Othello we ought to proceed very much as if his wife were indeed guilty of what she is charged with: for, were she ever so guilty, he could scarce have stronger proof than he has; and surely it is no sin in him that the evidence owes all its force to the plotting and lying of another.

Nevertheless I am far from upholding that the Moor does not in any stage of the proceedings show signs of jealousy.

For the elements of this passion exist in the clearest and healthiest minds, and may be kindled into a transient sway over them; and all I mean to affirm is, that jealousy is not the leading feature of Othello's character, much less his character itself. It is indeed certain that he doubts before he has proof; but then it is also certain that he does not act upon his doubt, till proof has turned it into conviction. As to the rest, it seems to me there can be no dispute about the thing, but only about the term; some understanding by *jealousy* one thing, and some another. I presume no one would have spoken of Othello as acting from jealousy, had the charge been really true; in that case, his course would have been regarded as the result of conviction upon evidence; which is, to my mind, nearly decisive of the question.

Accordingly in the killing of Desdemona we have the proper marks of a judicial as distinguished from a revengeful act. The Moor goes about her death calmly and religiously, as a duty from which he would gladly escape by his own death, if he could; and we feel that his heart is wrung with inexpressible anguish, though his hand is firm. It is a part of his heroism, that as he prefers her to himself, so he prefers honour to her; and he manifestly contemplates her death as a sacrifice due to the religion which he believes her to have mocked and profaned.

The general custom of the stage has been to represent Othello as a full-blooded Negro; and criticism has been a good deal exercised of late on the question whether Shakespeare meant him for such. The only expression that would fairly infer him to be a Negro is Roderigo's *thick-lips*. But Roderigo there speaks as a disappointed lover, seeking to revenge himself on the cause of his disappointment. Coxcombs, like him, when balked and mortified in rivalry with their betters, naturally fly off into extravagant terms of disparagement and reproach; their petulant vanity easing and soothing itself by calling them any thing they may wish them to be. It is true, the Moor is several times spoken of as *black;*

but this term was often used, as it still is, of a tawny skin in comparison with one that was fair. The Poet has divers instances of this in his other plays. In fact, the calling a dark-skinned white person black is among the commonest forms of speech in the language.

It would seem, from Othello's being so often termed "the Moor," that there ought to be no question as to what the Poet meant him to be. For the difference of Moors and Negroes was as well known in his time as it is now; and that he thought them the same is no more likely from this play than from *The Merchant of Venice*, where the Prince of Morocco comes as a suitor to Portia, and in a stage-direction of the old quarto is called "a *tawny* Moor." Othello was a Mauritanian prince. That he was a prince we learn from himself; that he was a Mauritanian we learn from Iago, who in one place speaks of his purposed retirement to Mauritania as his home. Consistently with this the same speaker elsewhere uses terms implying him to be a native of Barbary; Mauritania being an old name of one of the Barbary States. Iago, to be sure, is an unscrupulous liar; but he is too shrewd to lie when the truth will serve his purpose equally well, as it will in this case. With the Negroes, moreover, the Venetians had nothing to do; but they had much intercourse with the Moors, who were a civilized, warlike, enterprising race, such as might well furnish an Othello.

The Moor's character, direct and single in itself, is worked out with great breadth and clearness. In the opening scene we have Iago telling sundry lies about him; yet the lying is so managed as, while effecting its immediate purpose on the gull, to be at the same time more or less suggestive of the truth: he caricatures Othello, but is too artful a caricaturist to let the peculiar features of the subject be lost; that is, there is truth enough in what he says to make it pass with one who wishes it true, and is weak enough to let the wish shape his belief.

Othello's mind is strongly charged with the enthusiasm of high principle and earnest feeling; which gives a certain elevated and imaginative turn to his speech. In the deportment of such a man there is apt to be something on which a cold and crafty malice can easily stick the imputation of being haughty and grandiloquent. Especially, when urged with unseasonable or impertinent solicitations, his answers are apt to be in such a style, that they can hardly pass through an Iagoish mind without catching the air of strutting and bombastic evasion. For a man like Othello will not stoop to be the advocate or apologist of himself: it is enough that he stands approved to his own sense of right; and to explain his conduct, save where he is responsible, looks like soliciting an indorsement from others, as though the conscience of rectitude were not enough to sustain him. Such a man is apt to succeed; for by his strength of character he naturally creates a sphere which himself alone can fill, and so makes himself necessary. On the other hand, a subtle and malignant rogue, like Iago, while fearing to be known as the foe of such a man, envies his success, and from this envy affects contempt of his qualities. For the proper triumph of a bad man over his envied superiors is to scoff at the very gifts that inwardly gnaw him.

The hints, then, derived from Iago plant in us a certain forecast of the Moor as one who deliberates calmly, and therefore decides firmly. His refusing to explain where he is not responsible, is a pledge that he will not shrink from any responsibility where he truly owes it. At our first meeting with him, these anticipations are made good. Brabantio, on learning what has happened, rallies up some officers, and goes with them in pursuit of the Moor: Iago sees them coming, and urges him to elude their search:

> "*Iago.* These are the raisèd father and his friends:
> You were best go in.
> *Othel.* Not I; I must be found:
> My parts, my title, and my perfect soul,
> Shall manifest me rightly."

Here we see that, as he acts from honour and principle, so he will cheerfully abide the consequences. Full of equanimity and firmness, he is content to let the reasons of his course appear in the issues thereof.

From his characteristic intrepidity and calmness, the Moor, as we learn in the sequel, has come to be esteemed, by those who know him best, as one "whom passion cannot shake." For the passions are in him both tempered and strengthened by the energy of higher principles; and, if kept under reason, the stronger they are, the more they exalt reason. This feature of Othello is well shown when the fore-mentioned pursuers come upon him, and Brabantio exclaims, "Down with him, thief!" Both sides draw and make ready to fight, and the Moor quiets them:

> "Keep up your bright swords, for the dew will rust them. —
> Good Signior, you shall more command with years
> Than with your weapons."

Here the belligerent spirit is as much charmed down by his playful logic as overawed by his sternness of command. The very rhythm in which he speaks the order has, to my taste, a spice of good-humoured irony in it. And throughout the scene he appears

> "the noble nature whose solid virtue
> The shot of accident nor dart of chance
> Could neither graze nor pierce":

his intrepid calmness, his bland modesty, his manly frankness, and considerative firmness, are all displayed to great advantage, marking his character as one made up of the most solid and gentle qualities. Though he has nowise wronged Brabantio, he knows that he seems to have done so: his feelings therefore take the old man's part, and he respects his age and sorrow too much to resent his abuse.

Such is our sturdy warrior's habitual carriage: no upstart exigency disconcerts him, no obloquy exasperates him to violence or recrimination: peril, perplexity, provocation, rather augment than impair his self-possession; and the

more deeply he is stirred, the more calmly and steadily he acts. This "calmness of intensity," as some one calls it, has perhaps its finest issue in his address to the Senate, where the words, though they fall on the ear as softly as an evening breeze, seem charged with life from every part of his being. All is grace and modesty and gentleness; yet what strength and dignity! the union of perfect repose and impassioned energy.

And here I am reminded of a deeply-significant point of contrast between the Moor and Iago, which ought not to be left unmarked. Iago is morbidly introversive and self-explicative; his mind is evermore spinning out its own contents; and he takes no pleasure in showing things, or even in seeing them, till he has first baptized them in his own spirit, and then seems chuckling inwardly as he holds them up reeking with the slime he has dipped them in. In Othello, on the contrary, every thing is direct, healthy, objective; and he reproduces in transparent diction the truth as revealed to him from without, his mind being like a clear, even mirror, which, invisible itself, gives back the exact shape and colour of whatever stands before it.

I know of nothing in Shakespeare that has this quality more conspicuous than the Moor's account "how I did thrive in this fair lady's love, and she in mine":

> "Her father lov'd me; oft invited me;
> Still question'd me the story of my life,
> From year to year; the battles, sieges, fortunes,
> That I have pass'd.
> I ran it through, even from my boyish days
> To th' very moment that he bade me tell it.
> This to hear
> Would Desdemona seriously incline:
> But still the house-affairs would draw her thence;
> Which ever as she could with haste despatch,
> She'd come again, and with a greedy ear
> Devour up my discourse. Which I observing,
> Took once a pliant hour; and found good means
> To draw from her a prayer of earnest heart
> That I would all my pilgrimage dilate,

Whereof by parcels she had something heard,
But not intentively: I did consent;
And often did beguile her of her tears,
When I did speak of some distressful stroke
That my youth suffer'd. My story being done,
She gave me for my pains a world of sighs:
She swore, *In faith, 'twas strange, 'twas passing strange;*
'Twas pitiful, 'twas wondrous pitiful:
She wish'd she had not heard it; yet she wish'd
That Heaven had made her such a man: she thank'd me;
And bade me, if I had a friend that lov'd her,
I should but teach him how to tell my story,
And that would woo her. Upon this hint I spake:
She lov'd me for the dangers I had pass'd;
And I lov'd her, that she did pity them.
This only is the witchcraft I have us'd."

Here the dark man eloquent literally speaks pictures. We see the silent blushing maiden moving about her household tasks, ever and anon turning her eye upon the earnest warrior; leaving the door open as she goes out of the room, that she may catch the tones of his voice; hastening back to her father's side, as though drawn to the spot by some new impulse of filial attachment; afraid to look the speaker in the face, yet unable to keep out of his presence, and drinking in with ear and heart every word of his marvellous tale: the Moor meanwhile waxing more eloquent when this modest listener was by, partly because he saw she was interested, and partly because he wished to interest her still more. Yet we believe all he says, for the virtual presence of the things he describes enables us, as it were, to test the fidelity of his representation.

In his simplicity, however, the Moor lets out a truth of which he seems not to have been aware. At Brabantio's fireside he has been unwittingly making love by his manner, before he was even conscious of loving; and thought he was but listening for a disclosure of the lady's feelings, while he was really soliciting a response to his own: for love is a matter wherein heart often calls and answers to heart without giving the head any notice of its proceed-

ings. His quick perception of the interest he had awakened is a confession of the interest he felt, the state of his mind coming out in his anxiety to know that of hers. And how natural it was that he should thus honestly think he was but returning her passion, while it was indeed his own passion that caused him to see or suspect she had any to be returned! And so she seems to have understood the matter; whereupon, appreciating the modesty that kept him silent, she gave him a hint of encouragement to speak. In his feelings, moreover, respect keeps pace with affection; and he involuntarily seeks some tacit assurance of a return of his passion as a sort of permission to cherish and confess it. It is this feeling that originates the delicate, reverential courtesy, the ardent, yet distant, and therefore beautiful, regards, with which a truly honourable mind instinctively attires itself towards its best object; a feeling that throws a majestic grace around the most unpromising figure, and endows the plainest features with something more eloquent than beauty.

Before passing on from this part of the theme, it may be well to note one item of the forecited speech. Othello says of the lady, "She wish'd that Heaven had made her such a man." A question has lately been raised whether the meaning here is, that she wished such a man had been made *for* her, or that she herself had been made such a man; and several have insisted on the latter, lest her delicacy should be impeached. Her delicacy, I hope, stands in need of no such critical attorneyship. Othello was indeed just such a man as Desdemona wanted; and her letting him understand this, was doubtless a part of the *hint* whereon he spoke. She is too modest to be prudish.

The often-alleged unfitness of Othello's match has been mainly disposed of by what I have already said touching his origin. The rest of it, if there be any, may be safely left to the fact of his being honoured by the Venetian Senate, and a cherished guest at Brabantio's fireside. At

all events, I cannot help thinking that the noble Moor and his sweet lady have the very sort of resemblance which people thus united ought to have; and their likeness seems all the better for being joined with so much of unlikeness. It is the chaste, beautiful wedlock of meekness and magnanimity, where the inward correspondence stands the more approved for the outward diversity; and reminds us of what we are too apt to forget, that the stout, valiant soul is the chosen home of reverence and tenderness. Our heroic warrior's dark, rough exterior is found to enclose a heart strong as a giant's, yet soft and sweet as infancy. Such a marriage of bravery and gentleness proclaims that beauty is an overmatch for strength, and that true delicacy is among the highest forms of power.

Equally beautiful is the fact, that Desdemona has the heart to recognize the proper complement of herself beneath such an unattractive appearance. Perhaps none but so pure and gentle a being could have discerned the real gentleness of Othello through so many obscurations. To her fine sense, that tale of wild adventures and mischances which often did beguile her of her tears, — a tale wherein another might have seen but the marks of a rude, coarse, animal strength, — disclosed the history of a most meek, brave, manly soul. Nobly blind to whatever is repulsive in his manhood's vesture, her thoughts are filled with "his honours and his valiant parts"; she "sees Othello's visage in his mind"; his ungracious aspect is lost to her in his graces of character; and the shrine that were else so unattractive to look upon is made beautiful by the life with which her chaste eye sees it irradiated.

In herself Desdemona is not more interesting than several of the Poet's women; but perhaps none of the others is in a condition so proper for developing the innermost springs of pathos. In her character and sufferings there is a nameless something that haunts the reader's mind, and hangs like a spell of compassionate sorrow upon the beatings of his heart: his thoughts revert to her and linger

about her, as under a mysterious fascination of pity which they cannot shake off, and which is only kept from being painful by the sacred charm of beauty and eloquence that blends with the feeling while kindling it. It is remarkable that the sympathies are not so deeply moved in the scene of her death as in that where by the blows of her husband's tongue and hand she is made to feel that she has indeed lost him. Too innocent to suspect that she is suspected, she cannot for a long time understand or imagine the motives of his harshness; and her errings in quest of excuses and apologies for him are deeply pathetic, inasmuch as they manifestly spring from her incapability of an impure thought. And the sense that the heart of his confidence is gone from her, and for what cause it is gone, comes upon her like a dead stifling weight of agony and woe, which benumbs her to all other pains. She does not show any thing that can be properly called pangs of suffering; the effect is too deep for that; the blow falling so heavy, that it stuns her sensibilities into a sort of lethargy.

Desdemona's character may almost be said to consist in the union of purity and impressibility. All her organs of sense and motion seem perfectly ensouled, and her visible form instinct in every part with the spirit and intelligence of moral life:

> "We understood
> Her by her sight; her pure and eloquent blood
> Spoke in her cheeks, and so distinctly wrought,
> That one might almost say her body thought."

It is through this most delicate impressibility that she sometimes gets frightened out of her proper character; as in her equivocation about the handkerchief, and her child-like pleading for life in the last scene; where her perfect candour and resignation are overmastered by sudden impressions of terror.

But, with all her openness to influences from without, she is still susceptive only of the good. No element of impurity can insinuate itself. Her nature seems wrought about

with some subtile texture of moral sympathies and antipathies, which selects, as by instinct, whatsoever is pure, without taking any thought or touch of the evil mixed with it. Even Iago's moral oil-of-vitriol cannot eat a passage into her mind: from his envenomed wit she extracts the element of harmless mirth, without receiving or suspecting the venom with which it is charged. Thus the world's contagions pass before her, yet dare not touch nor come near her, because she has nothing to sympathize with them, or to own their acquaintance. And so her life is like a quiet stream

> "In whose calm depth the beautiful and pure
> Alone are mirror'd; which, though shapes of ill
> Do hover round its surface, glides in light,
> And takes no shadow from them."

Desdemona's heroism, I fear, is not of the kind to take very well with such an age of individual ensconcement as the present. Though of a "high and plenteous wit and invention," this element never makes any special report of itself; that is, she has mind enough, but very little of mental demonstrativeness. Like Cordelia, all the parts of her being speak in such harmony, that the intellectual tones may not be distinctly heard. Besides, her mind and character were formed under that old-fashioned way of thinking which, regarding man and wife as socially one, legislated *round* them, not *between* them; as meaning that the wife should seek protection *in* her husband, instead of resorting to legal methods for protection *against* him. Affection does indeed fill her with courage and energy of purpose: she is heroic to link her life with the man she loves; heroic to do and to suffer with him and for him, after she is his; but, poor gentle soul! she knows no heroism that can prompt her, in respect of him, to cast aside the awful prerogative of defencelessness: that she has lost him, is what hurts her; and this is a hurt that cannot be salved with anger or resentment: so that her only strength is to be meek, uncomplaining, submissive, in the worst that his hand may execute.

> "Mightier far
> Than strength of nerve and sinew, or the sway
> Of magic potent over Sun and star,
> Is love, though oft to agony distrest,
> And though his favourite seat be feeble woman's breast."

Swayed by this power, our heroine is of course "a child to chiding," and sinks beneath her husband's unkindness, instead of having the spirit to outface it.

They err greatly who think to school Desdemona in the doctrine of woman's rights. When her husband has been shaken from his confidence in her truth and loyalty, what can she care for her rights as a woman? To be under the necessity of asserting them is to have lost, and more than lost them. A constrained abstinence from evil deeds and unkind words bears no price with her; and to be sheltered from the wind and storm is worse than nothing to her, unless she have a living fountain of light and warmth in the being that shelters her. But indeed the beauty of the woman is so hid in the affection and obedience of the wife, that it almost seems a profanation to praise it. As brave to suffer wrong as she is fearful to do it, there is a holiness in her mute resignation, which ought, perhaps, to be kept, where the Poet has left it, veiled from the eyes of all save those whom a severe discipline of humanity may have qualified for duly respecting it. At all events, whoever would get at her secret, let him study her as a pupil, not as a critic; and, until his inmost heart speak her approval in regard of all her behaviour towards the Moor, let him rest assured that he is not competent to judge her; and that he has much to learn, before he will be worthy to speak of her. But if he have the gift to see that her whole course in this behalf, from the hour of her marriage to the last groan of the ever-loving, ever-obedient, broken-hearted wife, is replete with the beauty and grace and honour of womanhood; then let him weep, weep, weep for her; so may he depart "a sadder and a wiser man!" As for her unresisting submissiveness, let no man dare to defend it! Assuredly we

shall do her a great wrong, and ourselves a greater wrong, if we suppose, for a moment, that she would not rather die by her husband's hand than owe her life to any protection against him. What, indeed, were life, what could it be, to her, since suspicion has fallen on her innocency? That her husband could not, would not, *dare* not, wrong her, even because she had trusted in him, and because in her sacred defencelessness she could not resist nor resent the wrong, — this is the only protection from which she would not pray on her bended knees to be delivered!

Coleridge justly remarks upon the art shown in Iago, that the character, with all its inscrutable depravity, neither revolts nor seduces the mind: the interest of his part amounts almost to fascination, yet there is not the slightest moral taint or infection about it. Hardly less wonderful is the Poet's skill in carrying the Moor through such a course of undeserved infliction, without any loosening of his hold on our sympathy and respect. Deep and intense as is the feeling that goes along with the heroine, Othello fairly divides it with her: rather the virtues and sufferings of each are so managed as to heighten the interest of the other. The impression still waits upon the Moor, that he does "nought in hate, but all in honour." Nor is the mischief made to work through any vice or weakness perceived or felt in him, but rather through such qualities as lift him higher in our regard. Under the conviction that she in whom he had set his faith and garnered up his heart; that she in whom he had looked to find how much more blessed it is to give than to receive, has desecrated all his gifts, and turned his very religion into sacrilege; — under this conviction, all the grace, the poetry, the consecration, of life is gone; his whole being, with its freight of hopes, memories, affections, is reduced to an utter wreck; a last farewell to whatsoever has made life attractive, the conditions, motives, prospects, of noble achievement, is all there is left him: in brief, he feels literally unmade, robbed not only of the

laurels he has won, but of the spirit that manned him to the winning of them; so that he can neither live nobly nor nobly die, but is doomed to a sort of living death, an object of scorn and loathing unto himself. In this state of mind, no wonder his thoughts reel and totter, and cling convulsively to his honour, which is the only thing that now remains to him, until in his effort to rescue this he loses all, and has no refuge but in self-destruction. He approaches the dreadful task in the bitterness as well as calmness of despair. In sacrificing his love to save his honour he really performs the most heroic self-sacrifice; for the taking of Desdemona's life is to him far worse than to lose his own. Nor could he have loved her so much, had he not loved honour more. Her love for him, too, is based on the self-same principle which now prompts and nerves him to the sacrifice. And as at last our pity for her rises into awe, so our awe of him melts into pity; the catastrophe thus blending their several virtues and sufferings into one most profound, solemn, sweetly-mournful impression. Well may we ask, with Coleridge, "as the curtain drops, which do we pity most?"

CORIOLANUS.

The Tragedy of Coriolanus was never printed till in the folio of 1623, and is among the worst specimens of printing in that volume. The text as there delivered abounds in palpable corruptions; critical sagacity and ingenuity have done their utmost, apparently, towards rectifying the numerous errors, and in not a few cases have been rewarded with fair success; still there are some passages that seem to defy all the resources of corrective art. Collier's famous second folio has furnished more of valuable aid in this than in any other play of the series. For instance, the change there made of "bosom multiplied" into

"bisson multitude," in Act iii. scene 1, is undoubtedly among our happiest corrections or restorations of the Poet's language. Several others from the same source, if not so important in themselves, are hardly less apt for the sense.

The tragedy is not heard of at all through any notice or allusion made during the author's life: in fact, we have no contemporary note of reference to it whatever, save in the elegy on Richard Burbadge,* where we learn that the hero's part was sustained by that celebrated actor. So that we are left without any external evidence as to the date of the writing. Nor does the piece itself contain a traceable vestige of allusion to any known contemporary events; such, for instance, as that to the new creation of baronets in *Othello*. Our only argument, therefore, as regards the time of composition lies in marks of style, use of language, and complexion of imagery and thought; in all which respects it clearly falls among the very latest of the Poet's writing. Certainly no play of the series surpasses it, and very few, if any, equal it, in boldness of metaphor, in autocratic prerogative of expression, or in passages marked by an overcrowding of matter or an overcompression of language. The strength of civil wisdom, also, the searching anatomy of public characters and motives, the wide and firm grasp of social and political questions, in short, the whole moral and intellectual climate of the piece, — all concur with the former notes in marking it off to the Poet's highest maturity of thought and power. Therewithal I hold it to be among his greatest triumphs in organization: I cannot point out, I believe no one has pointed out, a single instance where the parts might have been better ordered for the proper effect of the whole; while the interest never once flags or falters, nor suffers any break or diversion, from the beginning to the end: rather say, it holds on with ever-increasing force throughout, and draws all the details into its current; so that the unity of impres-

* The same that is quoted on page 425 of this volume.

sion is literally perfect. In this great point of dramatic architecture, I think it bears the palm clean away from both the other Roman tragedies; and indeed I am not sure but it should be set down as the peer of *Othello*, *Macbeth*, and *King Lear*.

In this, as in the other Roman plays, the historical matter was drawn from Sir Thomas North's translation of Plutarch. The events of the drama as related in the old Greek's *Life of Coriolanus* extend over a period of about four years, from the popular secession to the Sacred Mount, B. C. 494, to the hero's death, B. C. 490. The capture of Corioli is now reckoned to the year B. C. 493.

The severity of criticism applied in recent times has made rather sweeping work with the dim heroic traditions of old Rome; insomuch that the story of Coriolanus has now come to be generally regarded as among the most beautiful of the early Roman legends. With these questions, however, Shakespeare of course did not concern himself: like others of his time, he was content to take the rambling and credulous, but lively and graphic narratives of Plutarch as veritable and authentic history. And he would have been every way justifiable in doing this, even if the later arts of historic doubting and sifting, together with the results thereof, had been at his command. For his business as an artist was to set forth a free and life-like portraiture of human character as modified by the old Roman nationality, and clothed with the drapery of the old Roman manners. Here, then, the garrulous and gossiping old story-teller of Cheronea was just the man for him; since it will hardly be questioned that his tales, whether legendary or not, are replete with the spirit and life of the times and places to which they refer.

The Coriolanus of Plutarch offered the Poet a capital basis for the construction of a great dramatic hero. Hardly any other passage indeed of Roman history could furnish so grand and inviting a theme for personal delineation. The

main outlines of the man's character, and also the principal actions ascribed to him, are copied faithfully from the historian; while those outlines are filled up and finished with a wealth of invention and a depth of judgment which the Poet has perhaps nowhere surpassed. The proportions are indeed gigantic, not to say superhuman; so much so, that the boldest of delineators might well have scrupled such a portrait, but that he had so strong a warrant of historic faith to bear him out. The other personal figures, also, with the one exception of Menenius Agrippa, were in like sort derived from the same time-honoured repository. And the point most worth noting is, that from the parts and fragments thence derived, rich and fresh as these often are, the Poet should have reproduced, as it were, the entire form and order of their being, creating an atmosphere and environing which so fit and cohere with what he borrowed, that the whole has the air and movement of an original work. For it may be observed that all the humorous and amusing scenes — and Shakespeare has few that are more choicely conceived or more aptly used — are supplied from the Poet's own mind; there being no hint towards these in Plutarch, except the fable rehearsed and applied by old Menenius, who is merely described as one of "the pleasantest old men, and the most acceptable to the people." And yet how exquisite the keeping of these scenes with the other matter of the play! and how perfectly steeped they seem to be in the very genius and spirit of the old Roman life and manners!

Nor does the Poet's borrowing in this case stop with incidents or with lines of character: it extends to the very words and sentences of the old translator, and this sometimes for a considerable space together. In illustration of this, I copy, with slight abridgment, the passage describing the flight of Coriolanus to Antium, and his reception by Aufidius:

"It was even twilight when he entered the city, and many people met him in the streets, but no man knew him.

So he went immediately to Tullus Aufidius' house, and when he came thither he got him up straight to the chimney-hearth, and sat him down, and spake not a word, his face all muffled over. They of the house spying him wondered what he should be, yet they durst not bid him rise: for, disguised as he was, yet there appeared a certain majesty in his countenance and in his silence; whereupon they went to Tullus who was at supper, to tell him of the strange disguising of this man. Tullus rose presently from the board, and coming towards him asked who he was, and wherefore he came. Then Marcius unmuffled himself, and, after he had paused awhile, said, 'If thou knowest me not yet, Tullus, and seeing me dost not believe me to be the man I am indeed, I must of necessity bewray myself to be that I am. I am Caius Marcius, who hath done to thyself particularly, and to all the Volsces generally, great hurt and mischief, which I cannot deny for my surname Coriolanus that I bear. For I never had other benefit of the painful service I have done, and the extreme dangers I have been in, but this surname; — a good memory and witness of the malice and displeasure thou shouldest bear me. Indeed the name only remaineth with me: for the rest the envy and cruelty of the people of Rome have taken from me, by the sufferance of the dastardly Nobility and magistrates, who have forsaken me, and let me be banished by the people. This extremity hath now driven me to come as a poor suitor, to take thy chimney-hearth: not of any hope I have to save my life thereby; for if I had feared death, I would not have come hither to put myself in hazard; but pricked forward with desire to be revenged of them that thus have banished me; which now I do begin, in putting my person into the hands of their enemies. Wherefore, if thou hast any heart to be wreaked of the injuries thy enemies have done thee, speed thee now, and let my misery serve thy turn, and so use it, that my services may be a benefit to the Volsces; promising thee that I will fight with better will for you than I did when I was against you; knowing that they fight more

valiantly who know the force of the enemy than such as have never proved it. But if it be so that thou dare not, and art weary to prove fortune any more, then am I also weary to live any longer. And it were no wisdom in thee to save the life of him who hath been heretofore thy mortal enemy, and whose service now can nothing help nor pleasure thee.' Tullus, hearing what he said, was a marvellous glad man, and, taking him by the hand, said unto him, 'Stand up, O Marcius, and be of good cheer; for in proffering thyself unto us thou doest us great honour; and by this means thou mayest hope also of greater things at all the Volsces' hands.' So he feasted him for that time, and entertained him in the honourablest manner he could, talking with him of no other matter at that present; but within a few days they fell to consultation in what sort they should begin their wars."

To this I must add the still more remarkable passage relating the visit of the Roman ladies to the enemy's camp, and the interview between Volumnia and her son:

"Now was Marcius set in his chair of state, and when he spied the women coming afar off he marvelled what it meant; but afterwards, knowing his wife, who came foremost, he determined at the first to persist in his rancour. But in the end, being altered to see them, his heart would not serve him to tarry their coming to his chair; but, coming down in haste, he went to meet them, and first he kissed his mother and embraced her awhile, then his wife and little children. And nature so wrought in him, that the tears fell from his eyes, and he could not keep himself from making much of them. Then, perceiving that his mother would speak, he called the chiefest of the Volsces to hear what she would say. Then she spake in this sort:

"'If we held our peace, my son, and determined not to speak, the state of our poor bodies and present sight of our raiment would easily bewray to thee what life we have led at home since thy exile: but think now with thyself how much more unfortunate than all the women living we are

come hither, considering that the sight which should be most pleasant to behold, spiteful fortune hath made most fearful to us; making myself to see my son, and my daughter here her husband, besieging the walls of his native country; so as that which is the only comfort to all others in their adversity, to pray unto the gods and to call to them for aid, is the thing which plungeth us in most deep perplexity. For we cannot, alas! together pray both for victory to our country and for safety of thy life; but a world of grievous curses, yea, more than any mortal enemy can heap upon us, are forcibly wrapped up in our prayers. For the bitter sop of most hard choice is offered thy wife and children either to lose the person of thyself or the nurse of their native country. For myself, my son, I am determined not to tarry till fortune in my lifetime do make an end of this war; for, if I cannot persuade thee rather to do good unto both parties than to overthrow and destroy the one, trust unto it, thou shalt no sooner march forward to assault thy country, but thy foot shall tread upon thy mother's womb, that brought thee first into this world. And I may not defer to see the day, either that my son be led prisoner in triumph by his natural countrymen or that he himself do triumph of them. If it were so that my request tended to save thy country in destroying the Volsces, I must confess thou wouldest hardly resolve on that: for as to destroy thy country is altogether unmeet and unlawful; so were it not just, and less honourable, to betray those that put their trust in thee. But my only demand consisteth to make a jail-delivery of all evils, which delivereth equal benefit and safety to both, but most honourable to the Volsces. For it shall appear that, having victory in their hands, they have granted us singular graces, peace and amity; of which good, if so it come to pass, thyself is the only author, and so hast thou the honour. But, if it fail, thyself alone shall carry the shameful reproach of either party. So, though the end of war be uncertain, yet this is most certain, — that, if it be thy chance to conquer,

this benefit shalt thou reap of thy goodly conquest, to be chronicled the plague and destroyer of thy country. And if fortune overthrow thee, then the world will say, that through desire to revenge thy private injuries thou hast forever undone thy friends who did most lovingly receive thee. — My son, why dost thou not answer me? Dost thou take it honourable for a noble man to remember the wrongs and injuries done him, and dost not think it an honest man's part to be thankful for the goodness that parents do show to their children? No man living is more bound to show himself thankful in all parts and respects than thyself. Thou hast not hitherto showed thy poor mother any courtesy, and therefore it is not only honest, but due unto me, that I should obtain my so just and reasonable request of thee. But since by reason I cannot persuade thee, to what purpose do I defer my last hope?'

"With these words, herself, his wife, and children fell down upon their knees before him. Marcius seeing that could refrain no longer, but went straight and lift her up, crying out, 'O mother, what have you done to me?' And, holding her hard by the right hand, 'O mother,' said he, 'you have won a happy victory for your country, but mortal and unhappy for your son; for I see myself vanquished by you alone.' These words being spoken openly, he spake a little apart with his mother and wife, and then let them return to Rome, for so they did request him; and so, remaining in the camp that night, the next morning he dislodged, and marched into the Volsces' country again."

I have said that Coriolanus as drawn by Plutarch held out strong and taking points of natural aptness for use as a grand dramatic hero, and that the Poet's delineation is marked by a substantial and even formal adherence to the legend in the main outlines of the character. Such a bold structure of old Roman manhood, or, if you please, such a bold reflection of the old Roman ideas and sentiments of manhood, must have been potently fascinating to Shake-

speare's mind: it was a subject for him to stretch his powers upon. But the matter, I think, had yet other attractions for him. For the social and political principles involved in those early struggles of the Herculean infant Commonwealth are among the gravest and most fruitful that human history has ever turned up to view. The whole subsequent life and grandeur of the Roman State was depending on the questions then in issue between the several orders of the people. So that the deepest problems of man's social and civil being came along naturally in the train of the hero's character. And Shakespeare's mode of treating the subject shows that he understood all this perfectly. The grand philosophic impartiality with which he weighs the different forces in action, and casts up or carries on in his mind the sum-total of results, fairly argues the matter to have been no less attractive to him as a field for discursive reason than for dramatic representation. The selection and disposing of the incidents, and the whole shaping and drift of the action, are ordered with consummate skill to this end. The historical events are seized not only in their richest poetical aspect, but also in their deepest political relations and bearings. And Shakespeare's mighty intellect may here almost be said to wanton and luxuriate on the very marrow of civil and philosophical discourse; insomuch that we may justly apply in this behalf the saying of Schlegel, that "under the seeming artlessness of adhering closely to history as he found it, a high degree of art is concealed."

Accordingly from the scenes of this play may be gathered, directly or by quick inference, a code and stock of practical wisdom large enough and various enough to furnish out the moralist and the statesman. Especially we here seem to have the concentrated essence of all that has been written, or that can be said, touching the relative claims of aristocracy and democracy. Nor need we travel any further to learn all there is to be known touching the genius and method of demagogic craft and management.

In the two Tribunes we have a full-drawn type of the class of men who in every age have made it their business or their pastime to wheedle and cajole and bamboozle the ignorant multitude, and drive them about in herds. At the same time, the rights of the people against those who would insult and oppress them are held in just and steady recognition. The whole work indeed bespeaks a mind which, without any loss of vigour or spirit, has ripened up into a sage-like calmness, clearness, and sobriety; which, as from a world-commanding eminence, has made a full and complete survey of humanity; which knows men through and through, both as individuals and as members of the body politic; and which understands how man and man, rank and rank, class and class, sex and sex, act and react on one another in all the civil and social relations of life; so that he can view and touch them, play or be serious with them, laugh at or instruct them, as one that is thoroughly at home both among and within them. Yet this large and varied science is kept in due subordination to the nature and law of the work, which is in no sort an essay or a treatise, nor carries any shade of a didactic purpose in its face, but is simply an elevation of history into pure drama. If indeed I were to mark the distinctive excellence of the piece, I should set it down as standing in a free union of the moral and political idea with the dramatic, or of the philosophic mind with the poetic.

Hazlitt charges that in this play the Poet shows a strong leaning to the side of Patrician arrogance and pride against the rights and feelings of the people. Therewithal he expatiates at large to make out how much more of poetry there is in the high treadings of aristocratic insolence than in the modest walking of Plebeian humility. According to his notion, a wolf raging among a flock of sheep is a far more poetical object than the terrified flock. This is "an old fond paradox," which would persuade us there is naturally more beauty in the doing of wrong than in the suffer-

ing of wrong, thus divorcing poetry from that which is right and good. For my part, I prefer a different faith; and I confess to finding more of poetry in Burns's "wee, modest crimson-tippèd flower" than in the high-flaunting plant that with its coarse proud face seems to mock the Sun.

There is, I believe, no ground for such a charge as Hazlitt's in this case. On the contrary, the play, I think, may be justly cited as a pattern of dramatic evenhandedness. The ugly and offensive points of the hero, those which draw upon him the people's hatred, are set forth unsparingly; not indeed naked and alone, for this were turning them into caricature, but in combination with high and noble traits, just as delivered in the history, and just as we are finding them perpetually in actual men. So, on the other side, much that is good and generous in the people, as well as what is envious and mean, has a kindly and cordial showing, sometimes playful indeed, and sometimes otherwise; but still so as, in effect, to engage them more of sympathy than of contempt. They are represented as bearing much, forgiving much; free to acknowledge the greatness of the haughty Patrician, and not more resenting his insolence than regretting it; and never withheld from making fair returns of honour even against many and great provocations, till set on fire by the tongues of ambitious and self-seeking agitators. If there be any person in the play whom the Poet leans to more than another, it is old Menenius, a frank, patriotic, liberal soul, who is genially and lovingly humorous towards the people even when his eye is upon their faults, yet free and upright in reproving them, though at the same time mindful of their virtues; who smilingly stoops to play jokes upon them, that so he may soothe and sweeten their exasperated minds; using his good-natured wit to heal as fast as his sharpness wounds; and thus standing at an equal remove from the insulting aristocrat and the snaky demagogue.

I will even venture to say that the people as here repre-

sented have in them a preponderance of the amiable and the good, while in the hero there is a clear preponderance of the reverse. It is true, they are something inconstant and uncertain in their temper, insomuch as to be reproached by him that "with every minute they do change a mind"; but he is quite as changeable as they, and withal much less excusable in his inconstancy. They do not indeed like to be scorned and mocked by their superiors, especially those who are soliciting their favour and support; whereas he, in his overwrought and passionate egotism, takes care to make them feel his contempt even while he is begging their votes. To be sure, he is frank and honest in his flouts and scoffs; but then he might be equally frank and honest in abstaining from them: or, if he cannot be kind and courteous to the people without being false to himself, this only argues the greater viciousness of temper in him. He, in his towering arrogance, would have his own will stand as an ultimate law both for himself and for them; but they are far from claiming any such monstrous prerogative over him: it is his pride to act towards them as if they had no business to exist but for the pleasure of such as he is; while they are merely acting on the principle that their own welfare and happiness should enter into the purpose of their living: he would stand "as if a man were author of himself, and knew no other kin," and would have them live entirely for his ends; whereas they insist on living partly for themselves; and all they claim is, that he shall own his nature to be kindred with theirs, and treat them as having the same human heart which beats in him. Thus their spirit is sociable and sympathetic; his, solitary and exclusive: he craves to dwell aloft where nothing but his own individuality can breathe; they prize the life which all have in common, and are for having the individual will of each tempered into harmony with that life.

Such is about the aspect which this delineation of old Roman society wears to me. So regarding it, of course I cannot see that the hero is glorified at the expense of the

people. He does indeed make a grander figure than they do: this was required both by the nature of the subject and by the laws of dramatic interest: but his grandeur, though it draws the imagination, is of a kind to repel the heart. We wonder at the man, but are far from loving him or wishing to be like him. True, at the capture of Corioli, the Poet makes the people fall to plundering, which draws upon them a storm of reproach from the hero: but this was in the history; moreover such has been the practice of common soldiers in all ages and places of the world. In short, the representation given of the people in this play is at all points true to the life: so that it does not well appear how those who despise them as here characterized can fail to despise them as they are in fact. To my thinking, the Poet's multitude in this case are both better and wiser than their Patrician contemner.

The remarks already made infer pride to be the backbone of the hero's character; this too a pride standing partly indeed on class and family grounds, but still more on such as are purely individual or personal. And such is the idea of the man which Shakespeare found in Plutarch, who prefaces his narrative with the following calm and weighty sentences touching the subject:

"While the force and vigour of his soul, and a persevering constancy in all he undertook, led him successfully into many noble achievements, yet, on the other side, by indulging the vehemence of his passion, and through an obstinate reluctance to yield or accommodate his humours and sentiments to those of people about him, he rendered himself incapable of acting and associating with others. Those who saw with admiration how proof his nature was against all the softness of pleasure, the hardships of service, and the allurements of gain, while allowing to that universal firmness of his the respective names of temperance, fortitude, and justice, yet, in the life of the citizen and the statesman, could not choose but be disgusted at the severity and rugged-

ness of his deportment, and with his overbearing, haughty, and imperious temper. Education and study, and the favours of the Muses, confer no greater benefit on those that seek them than these humanizing and civilizing lessons, which teach our natural qualities to submit to the limitations prescribed by reason, and to avoid the wildness of extremes."

In accordance with what is here said, Shakespeare not only makes pride the hero's master-principle, but also sets forth his pride as being rendered altogether inflammable and uncontrollable by passion; insomuch that, if a spark of provocation is struck into the latter, the former instantly flames up beyond measure, and sweeps away all the regards of prudence, of decorum, and even of common sense. It is therefore strictly characteristic of the man, that an unexpected word of reproach stings him to the quick: the instant it touches his ear, he explodes like a rocket. It is on this that the wily Tribunes work, plying their craft, and watching the time to sting him into some fatal provocation of popular resentment. Hence, also, the Poet, with great judgment, and without any hint from the history, makes Aufidius, when the time is ripe for firing off the conspiracy against his life, touch him into an ecstasy of passionate rage by spitting the term *boy* at him. Now his very pride, if duly guarded by the strengths of reason and self-respect, would have caused him, from the utter unfitness of such an epithet, to answer it with calm and silent scorn: but he resents it in proportion as it strikes wide of him, and makes its very absurdity the cause of its power over him.

The people, too, would gladly reward his noble acts with the highest honours in their gift, but that, to their sense, "he pays himself with being proud." They glory in his valour and prowess; his strength of heart and of hand is to them a theme of willing praise; but they complain, as they well may, that he is too proud of being so valiant: nay, an instinct of social reason tells them, and truly too, that his heroic exploits are done rather with a view to nurse and pamper his pride and self-will than from any impulse

of patriotism, of public spirit, or even of honourable ambition: in short, it is not at all to win their respect and goodwill, but only to feed his inordinate egotism, that he enacts the hero. They are even so liberal as to grant that the fault is something ingenerate in his nature, so that he cannot altogether help it, and are ready to make large allowance for him on this score: but then the more he helps them by his deeds, the more he wounds them with his insolence; nay, he seems to delight in serving them, only that he may turn his service into a vantage-ground for spurning them; and this is what they cannot bear, because it seems to them, as indeed it is, truly inhuman, and renders him unfit for any sort of intercourse with men.

There is withal much in the people that is really not deserving of respect. This the hero seizes on greedily, and makes the most of, as favouring that whereon his pride mainly fastens; and at the same time winks away whatever there is in them of a redeeming quality: he scorns their meanness, and is glad to find it in them, as giving him cause for scorning them: he prefers to see in them nothing but what is vile, and would fain make them as vile as he thinks them to be, that so his contempt may stand justified in his own sight. Still he is placed where his pride cannot reach its mark but by their suffrage; for its dearest gratification, he must pay his court to that which most galls and offends it. Here the people have a strong hold upon him. So nothing will do but that he try to extort their admiration and suffrage while making them hate his person: what he most prides himself upon is to have his greatness force honours from them notwithstanding his insolence to them; because such a contradiction between their feeling and their voting serves to emphasize his superiority. This is well shown in what falls from one of those almost characterless speakers in whom the Poet sometimes puts much candour and shrewdness of observation, and then uses them as the mouthpiece of his own judgment: "If he did not care whether he had their love or no, he'd waved indifferently

'twixt doing them neither good nor harm; but he seeks their hate with greater devotion than they can render it him, and leaves nothing undone that may fully discover him their opposite." Hence, when he goes out to beg their voices, he is careful to spice his requests with mockery, and to let them see that his spirit disclaims what his tongue speaks: then, if they excuse his spirit on the score of his formal compliance, this will be his triumph, and his pride will take a special benefit in their pocketing of his insults.

It is a bold but most natural stroke of character, that the hero, notwithstanding his alleged intense aversion to seeming at all the thing he is not, can yet dissemble to perfection when the doing so does not conflict with his ruling passion. From his bearing towards the people, one would suppose it were quite impossible for him to practise any sort of counterfeit or concealment. On this ground Menenius apologizes for his rough bluntness of manner:

> "His nature is too noble for the world:
> He would not flatter Neptune for his trident,
> Or Jove for's power to thunder. His heart's his mouth:
> What his breast forges, that his tongue must vent." —
> "Consider this: — he has been bred i' the wars
> Since he could draw a sword, and is ill school'd
> In bolted language; meal and bran together
> He throws without distinction."

Thus others think him, and he thinks himself, utterly incapable of simulating any thing on the outside that is not really in his heart. And when his friends entreat him to comply externally and in form with the people's humour, it really seems a necessity of nature with him to be the same without as he is within: so, after trying his best, apparently, to frame his mind to their request, he frankly declares at last,

> "I will not do 't;
> Lest I surcease to honour mine own truth,
> And by my body's action teach my mind
> A most inherent baseness."

But all this, as the sequel proves, is simply because his

pride does not draw in that direction, or rather draws directly the other way. For, after the sentence of exile, and when he is preparing to leave, he forthwith goes to practising the closest reserve and concealment of his mind, and appears indeed a complete master in dissimulative art. With his inner man in a perfect tempest of passion, he is nevertheless outwardly calm and serene: while the darkest thoughts of revenge are boiling within, his face and speech carry the style of the blandest and smoothest composure. And he not only seems placid and quiet himself, while his mother is deeply agitated with grief and anger, but goes to schooling her with her own former lessons of calmness and patience, reminding her how she "us'd to load him with precepts that would make invincible the heart that conn'd them"; insomuch that none suspect the stormy resolves and purposes he is forming. In all which his action is no doubt spontaneous, and proceeds rather from an instinct of passion than from any conscious art: but this only infers the more strongly how the same cause which, before, prevented his dissembling, now renders him a consummate dissembler. As he was then too proud to be other in mouth than he was in heart towards the people, so here his pride naturally puts him upon making his face the visard and not the index of his mind. Egotism and conscience are indeed very different things. But they sometimes get strangely mixed.

Coriolanus, however, is not altogether "himself his world and his own god": his will no doubt is to be so, and this is perhaps the most constant force in him; but he has other and better forces, which often rise against his egotism, and sometimes prevail over it, and at last carry the victory clean away from it. His character indeed is not a little mixed: and all its parts, good and bad, are fashioned on so large a scale as to yield matter enough for making out a strong case either way, according as the observer's mind is set to a course of all blame or all praise; while at the same time the several lines are so bold and pronounced, that it is

not easy for one to keep clear of all extremes, and so to take the impression of a given side as to fit the subject all round. Nor is his pride, with all its anti-social harshness, destitute of amiable and engaging features. There are some points of nobleness and magnanimity about it: the various regards of rank, family, country, talents, and courage enter into its composition, causing it to partake the general greatness of his character; and as it grows partly by what he derives from and shares with others, as well as by what is peculiar to himself, so it involves much of the spirit that commonly issues in great virtues as well as great faults. Hence it is not such as, of itself, to burn out the better juices of manhood: modesty, gratitude, openness of heart and hand, go in company with it. And so far it is of a genius and temper to keep clean and sweet the breast where it dwells; the principle of that inward discipline under which tenderness of heart, purity and rectitude of life, and many of the milder and gentler qualities have their best cherishing; a natural source of replenishment to whatever virtues it guards, because its own best nourishment is in the noble growth it fosters. Which is well evinced in that, with all his passionate craving of renown, he still counts it among his chief honours to be the cause that others are honoured. And if he is jealous of the position of his fellow Patricians, he is jealous of their merit too; would guard their virtue as carefully as their rank; is not less strenuous to have them deserve than to have them hold the place of supreme power and reverence in the State. So the Poet read in Plutarch how he besought the Patricians "to let the people know by their deeds, that they did not so much pass them in power and riches as in true nobility and valiantness." Nor should it be omitted that the admission of the people to a direct share in the government is a new thing with them: he is not used to it; he resents it as an invasion of ancient right; he fears it as a seed of political anarchy and dissolution. Old Rome was indeed a wonderful nation: Shakespeare

could not but be fascinated with the record of its splendours and greatness; and the hero's character offered him an apt and inviting occasion for representing the struggle between those two antagonist forces in the State whose reconcilement and unity did so much towards building and cementing the mighty structure.

I have spoken of the hero's modesty; yet I have to confess that there is something rather equivocal about it. He cannot indeed frame his mouth to the language of flattery, and he has an honest aversion to being flattered; and so far his temper is noble and just. Withal it seems really to offend him to hear himself praised; yet he is so ostentatious and emphatic, not to say supercilious, in his disgust of the thing, as to breed some doubt whether, after all, it is any thing but egotism in disguise, or whether it is not rather the offspring of arrogance than of real modesty. When he so energetically scouts to "hear his nothings monster'd," there is in his manner a strong relish of haughty contempt for his praisers, or a certain censorious loftiness of mind, as if he craved occasions for rebuking his friends and admirers, and of making them feel his immense superiority. Men have sometimes towered so high in self-approval as to scorn the approval of their fellow-men. And so our hero's behaviour in this point smacks a good deal as if his self-applause were so enormous, that the strongest applause of others seems to him utterly inadequate, or as if he felt his greatness to be of so transcendent a pitch as to "make breath poor and speech unable." Such a desperate calenture of egotism may, and sometimes does, pass for modesty, for it is apt to use the style of that virtue; the man seeming to shrink from the voice of praise, while in truth his extreme self-sufficiency merely leads him to think that none are able to appreciate him, or good enough to praise him. That Shakespeare saw the germs of this disease in the deep intricacies of the human heart, is apparent from his saying of another famous character, that "he speaks not to himself but with a pride that quarrels at self-breath." And the

delineation of Coriolanus has many notes which infer the man's disdaining of honours to be at least partly in the idea that no honours can come up to his merit. That the Poet conceived this as among the hero's traits of character, becomes evident when he makes his arrogance reach the height of supposing that all Rome cannot counterpoise his own gigantic importance. On being banished, Coriolanus assumes that the loss of his single person will be worse for Rome than the loss of Rome will be to him; and so retorts the sentence with —

> "You common cry of curs! whose breath I hate
> As reek o' the rotten fens, whose loves I prize
> As the dead carcasses of unburied men
> That do corrupt my air, — *I banish you.*"

But the man, it must be confessed, is gloriously proud of his mother: in fact, his pride in her is only less than his pride of personal greatness and of self. This is the one point indeed where his pride relaxes its anti-social stiffness, and ceases to be individual and exclusive. And it is very considerable that he appears noblest and strongest just when his nature outwrestles his purpose, and when his pride breaks down under the weight of filial reverence and duty. Shakespeare had it before him in Plutarch, that "the only thing which caused him to love honour was the delight his mother had of him; for nothing made him so happy as that she might always see him return with a crown upon his head, and still embrace him, with tears running down her cheeks for joy." And so, as represented in the drama, he can outface the rest of the world, but his mother, with his household treasures at her side, is too much for him: when he has conquered all the armies of his country, and has the State itself at his feet, her eloquence, her strength of soul, and patriotic devotion conquer him. In his rapture of self-will, he aspires to act the god, and thinks to stifle the heart's instincts, and to rise above the natural emotions; and he stands most redeemed to our judgment and our sense of manliness, when at last a diviner

power than will masters him, and the sacred regards of home triumph over his self-sufficiency, and his arrogance succumbs to the touch of domestic awe and tenderness, and he frankly yields himself human. Where have we another such an instance of pride struggling with affection, and of an iron will subdued by the spontaneous forces of the human breast, as when he sees the embassy of women approaching?

> "My wife comes foremost; then the honour'd mould
> Wherein this trunk was fram'd, and in her hand
> The grandchild to her blood. — But out, affection!
> All bond and privilege of nature, break!
> Let it be virtuous to be obstinate. —
> What is that curtsy worth? or those doves' eyes,
> Which can make gods forsworn? — I melt, and am not
> Of stronger earth than others. — My mother bows;
> As if Olympus to a molehill should
> In supplication nod; and my young boy
> Hath an aspect of intercession, which
> Great Nature cries *Deny not.*"

I know not where to look for a grander picture than we have in the same scene afterwards, when the conqueror's haughtiness and parricidal hardness gradually limber and soften, and at length fall clean away, at the voice of maternal intercession. Such a mingling of austerity and tenderness is met with nowhere else in Shakespeare's poetry. And it is to be noted that the mother's triumph does not seem to be fully consummated, till her great woman's heart stiffens up with something of the son's pride, and she turns away with an air of defiance:

> "Come, let us go:
> This fellow had a Volscian to his mother;
> His wife is in Corioli, and this child
> Like him by chance."

That she can be like him in pride thaws down that temper somewhat in him, and disposes him to be like her in other points. In accordance with his usual method, the Poet prepares us for this crowning victory of the mother by a lighter example in the same kind. I refer to the scene, iii.

2, where Volumnia urges her son to appease the infuriated multitude by playing the amiable towards them. His pride snaps off an intense repugnance to the undertaking, and she subdues him to it:

> "At thy choice, then:
> To beg of thee, it is my more dishonour
> Than thou of them. Come all to ruin: let
> Thy mother rather feel thy pride than fear
> Thy dangerous stoutness; for I mock at death
> With as big heart as thou. Do as thou list.
> Thy valiantness was mine, thou suck'dst it from me;
> But own'st thy pride thyself."

Nor is the mother's the only influence at work to break the hero out of his unnatural purpose and recall him to better thoughts. She indeed does nearly all the speaking; but her speech is powerfully reinforced by the presence and aspect of others. Little is said of Virgilia, and still less is said by her; but that little is so managed as to infer a great deal. A very gentle, retiring, undemonstrative person, she has withal much quiet firmness, and even a dash of something very like obstinacy, in her disposition. Her power touches the centre of her husband's heart; and it does this the better for being the power of delicacy and sweetness; a power the more effective with him, that it is so utterly unlike his own. So, when he returns from the war all covered with glory, her silent tears of joy are to him a sweeter tribute than the loud applause of all the rest: he hails her as "my gracious silence," and plays out his earnest tenderness in the question, "Would'st thou have laugh'd had I come coffin'd home, that weep'st to see me triumph?" How deeply her still forces have stolen into his being, is charmingly evinced in what he says to her when she comes with her speechless supplication to second the voice of maternal remonstrance:

> "Best of my flesh,
> Forgive my tyranny; but do not say
> For that, *Forgive our Romans.* O, a kiss
> Long as my exile, sweet as my revenge!

> Now, by the jealous Queen of Heaven, that kiss
> I carried from thee, dear, and my true lip
> Hath virgin'd it e'er since."

Here he finds his entire household in something more powerful than arms to resist him; the mother, the wife, the child, all are shaming his parricidal revenge by standing true to their fatherland against the son, the husband, and the father; and the words just quoted show that the might of the silent mourner is even more penetrating than that of the eloquent pleader. The two women have hearts stronger in love than his in pride; and the prime object of that love is the old Rome of their fathers: both the mother and the wife are steadfastly resolved that, if he march any further against that object, it shall be over their bodies; while the boy's Roman spirit flashes up in the strange declaration, "'A shall not tread on me; I'll run away till I am bigger, then I'll fight." The hideous unnaturalness of his course is brought fully home to him at thus seeing that the very childhood of his own flesh and blood is instinctively bent on resisting him, and will sooner disown his kindred and make war upon him than give way to his fury against their common nurse. Therewithal, in the presence of "the noble sister of Publicola, the Moon of Rome," he sees how all that is most illustrious in the same proud Patrician stock on which he so much prides himself, even those who were most hurt in his banishment, will rather unite with his banishers in imploring the gods against him than surrender their country to his revenge. And I am apt to think that what most took Shakespeare in this ancient tale of Roman patriotism was, that while, to the minds of those high-souled men and women, it was a great thing to be Patricians, to be Romans was a much greater.

A nation's favourite legends have a very close connection with its character, and are indeed the spontaneous outgrowth of its peculiar genius and spirit: that they reflect its ideals of right and good is what gives them life and cur

rency. Now, in the primitive Roman scheme of thought, the warrior held the first place, the mother the second. Womanhood in general was indeed a great power in old Rome, and to be a mother was the highest honour but one. Veneration of the matronage was the delight and pride of early Roman manhood: the gods were believed on several occasions to have bestowed special blessings and deliverances on the commonwealth through the women: temples were built, high honours paid to womanhood, in the faith that the women had repeatedly been the salvation of their country from ruin; and in the intercession which prevailed with our hero the women were held to have been kindled and moved to the undertaking by the special inspiration of the gods. In short, the men of old Rome seem to have thought that the gods would forthwith abandon them, if they ceased to respect their mothers and their wives.

In the legend of Coriolanus the hero's character stands out as a special impersonation of the two great ideas of martial courage and prowess, and of filial piety and submission. From this point, it draws deep into the general system of Roman morals and manners. Reverence for parents, the religion of home, the sacredness of the domestic enclosure, worship of the household gods, whatever shed consecration on the family, and surrounded it with the angels of piety and awe, — these were the corner-stone of the old Roman discipline, the palladium of the national strength and virtue. To fight bravely, to suffer heroically, for their country, were the outposts of manhood, the outside and public parts of manly honour; while its heart and centre stood in having something at home worth fighting and suffering for: of this something motherhood was the soul; and their best thoughts drew to the point of being "more brave for this, that they had much to love."

In this view, Volumnia aptly impersonates the woman's and the mother's side of the Roman system. She is a superb figure indeed, yet a genuine woman throughout, though with a high strain of what may be called manliness

pervading her womanhood. She has all of her son's essential strength and greatness of character, and is nearly as proud withal as he: but her pride has a much less individual and unsocial cast; he is the chief matter of her pride, while self is the chief matter of his: she is proud of him too far more for her country's sake than either for his or her own: her supreme ambition is that he should be the greatest among the Romans; and she would have his greatness stand in being more a Roman than any of the others. Hence her pride flames out in fierce resentment at the sentence of exile: her maternal heart boils over with passion, insomuch that to those who are nowise in sympathy with her anger she seems insane; and she bangs away at the Tribunes with the wildest notes of imprecation:

> "I would the gods had nothing else to do
> But to confirm my curses! Could I meet 'em
> But once a-day, it would unclog my heart
> Of what lies heavy to 't";

then hotly remonstrates against the quiet weeping grief of her daughter-in-law:

> "Anger's my meat; I sup upon myself,
> And so shall starve with feeding. — Come, let's go:
> Leave this faint puling, and lament as I do,
> In anger, Juno-like."

Against the people also she goes into a lingual tempest, and speaks as if she would gladly see Rome burnt, since Rome rejects her heart's idol; but the sequel shows this to be all because she is so intensely Roman in spirit: when things come to the pinch, her actions speak quite another language; and she is as far from sympathizing with her son in his selfish vindictiveness as she had been from sympathizing with the people's madness in banishing him. That a Roman should fight his way to the highest honours in Rome, is just what she believes in; but that he should fight for any thing but Rome, is beyond her conception. So, when she sees her son waging war against his country, where his home and all its treasures are, she considers him to have

renounced the only cause for fighting at all. It seems to her that he is making war against the one sole object or end of war; and she will rather disclaim her part in him than take part with him; nay, will rather die with Rome than see him grow by the death of that for which alone, in her view, a Roman should wish to live.

As the mother's pride is tempered by a more disinterested and patriotic spirit than the son's, so she holds a much more firm and steady course: her words, in moments of high resentment, fly about wildly indeed, but her heart sticks fast to its cherished aims. And her energy of thought and purpose, if not greater than her son's, yet in the end triumphs over his, because it proceeds on grounds less selfish and personal. She knows and feels that the gods are with her in it. The Poet wisely, and out of his own invention, represents her as exhorting him to temporize with the people, and to use arts for conciliating them which have no allowance in his bosom's truth:

> "I pr'ythee now, my son,
> Go to them, with this bonnet in thy hand;
> And — thus far having stretch'd it, (here be with them,)
> Thy knee bussing the stones, waving thy head,
> Which often, thus, correcting thy stout heart,
> Bow, humble as the ripest mulberry
> That will not hold the handling — say to them,
> Thou art their soldier, and, being bred in broils,
> Hast not the soft way which, thou dost confess,
> Were fit for thee to use, as they to claim,
> In asking their good loves; but thou wilt frame
> Thyself, forsooth, hereafter theirs, so far
> As thou hast power and person."

For even so, like a true woman, as she is, she "would dissemble with her nature, where her fortune and her friends at stake requir'd she should do so in honour." To her sense and judgment of things, deeds are to be weighed more by their ends and effects in regard of others than by their intrinsic quality to the doer's mind; that is, a man should act rather with a view to help and gladden and comfort

those about him, to serve his country and his kind, than to feed his moral egotism, or any sullen pride or humour of self-applause. It is even a rule of honour with her, that a man should, in his action, be more considerate of what will further the welfare and happiness of others than of what will please himself, or accord with any inward or ideal standard of his own. And so it is rightly in woman's nature, as being less wilful and more sympathetic in her reason, to judge of actions mainly by the practical consequences which she hopes or fears therefrom; I mean the consequences not only or chiefly to herself, but to those whom she loves. Therefore it is that women have so often been peace-makers in men's wars of opinions and passions and ideas; and I know not what would become of human society if their softer bosom did not come in to mitigate the sharpness of the brain.

Volumnia, though something more admirable than lovely in her style, is a capital representative of the old Roman matronly character, in which strength and dignity seem to have had rather the better of sweetness and delicacy, but which enshrined the very soul of rectitude and honour. And what a story does the life of this mother and this son, with their reciprocal action and influence, as set forth in the play, tell us of the old Roman domestic system, and of the religious awe of motherhood which formed so large and powerful an element in the social constitution of that wonderful people! What a comment, too, does all this, taken together with the history of that nation, read upon the Divine precept, "Honour thy father and thy mother, that thy days may be long in the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee"! For reverence of children to their parents is the principle that binds together successive generations in one continuous life. It is only by men's thinking and acting as in "the presence of canonized forefathers," that the elements of disorder in human nature can be withheld from running to fatal extremes. So that the loosening or impairing of this tie may well be feared as the beginning

of domestic and social dissolution; since they who forget or disown their fathers and mothers will naturally be forgotten and disowned in turn by their children; if indeed the very soul of parental instinct and religion does not get stifled out of them under a stress of luxury and selfishness. For the decay of filial respect and piety has sometimes gone so far, that men and women have come to regard it as among the greatest of evils to be fathers and mothers.

Tullus Aufidius makes a very effective foil to Coriolanus, the contrast between them being pressed forward in just the right way to show off the vein of true nobleness which there is in the latter. He has all the pride and passionateness of the hero, without any of his gratitude and magnanimity. In Coriolanus the spirit of rivalry and emulation never passes the bounds of honour; in the other, it turns to downright personal envy and hate. The hero glories in him as an antagonist, and loves to whip him in fair fight, but is far above all thought of ruining him or stabbing him in the dark. The shocking speech of Aufidius, in the first scene where he appears after the taking of Corioli, is a skilful forecast and premonition of his transport of baseness at the close:

> "Nor sleep nor sanctuary,
> Being naked, sick; nor fane nor Capitol,
> The prayers of priests nor times of sacrifice,
> Embankments all of fury, shall lift up
> Their rotten privilege and custom 'gainst
> My hate to Marcius: where I find him, were it
> At home, upon my brother's guard, even there,
> Against the hospitable canon, would I
> Wash my fierce hand in 's heart."

Hereupon Coleridge comments as follows: "I have such deep faith in Shakespeare's heart-lore, that I take for granted that this is in nature; although I cannot in myself discover any germ of possible feeling, which could wax and unfold itself into such a sentiment." The speech is hard indeed; but I do not take it as a fair index of the speaker's

real mind: it seems to me but one of those violent ebullitions of rage in which men's hearts are not so bad as their tongues; the impulsive extravagance of a very ambitious and inconstant nature writhing in an agony of disappointment. In such cases, dark thoughts often bubble up from unseen depths in the mind, yet do not crystallize into character. Still it must be owned that Aufidius comes pretty near putting the thought of the speech into act at last. Verplanck has a happy comment on the passage: "The mortification of defeat embitters Aufidius' rivalry into hatred. When, afterwards, his banished rival appeals to his nobler nature, that hatred dies away, and his generous feeling revives. Bitter jealousy and hatred again grow up, as his glories are eclipsed by his former adversary; yet this dark passion, too, finally yields to a generous sorrow at his rival's death. I think I have observed very similar alternations of such mixed motives and sentiments, in eminent men, in the collisions of political life."

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